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FROM THE UNSOUNDED SEA

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FROM THE UNSOUNDED SEA

A ROMANCE

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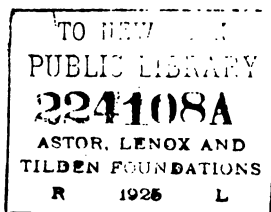
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FROM THE UNSOUNDED SEA

BOOK I

It was night upon the sea.

The moon had not risen, but the sky was brilliant with stars. Their keen, pale light showed the dark outlines of those pine-covered hills which fringed the shores of the Southern Sea, and the red, bare rocks jutting out into the water. In the curve of the bay, the windows of a villa glittered like tiny candles among the black shadows of the pines, and the grey and graceful ghosts of the mimosa trees.

Out in the dark, smooth water, a boat with an orange sail drifted lazily landward. A lighted torch, fixed in the bow of the vessel, flung a splash of lurid flame before it in the still air. A young man, in a rough blue linen suit and a big country hat, stood behind the torch with a fish-spear in his hand.

The profound silence of night was on the world.

Suddenly the silence was broken. Across the water, from the red rocks under the pines, came a cry, shrill, and terrible with fear—the cry of a

girl's voice rising sharp and clear into the breathless air.

The young man in the boat dropped his fish-spear and listened.

The cry came again and again—each time fainter and more despairing.

The young man seized his oars, and sent the boat flying through the water toward the shore.

The torchlight fell in a steady glare upon the sea. When the boat was about three hundred yards from land, there shot across the illumined pathway in which the boat seemed to move a confusion of moving things gleaming, wet and silvery, like a shoal of moving fish.

They passed with astonishing swiftness: the swell caused by their passage lifted the approaching boat like a great wave.

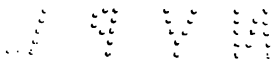
The young man dropped his oars, and stood up, peering eagerly forward toward the track of light. Across it something showed in a long line of fringed shadow.

He bent out of the boat and caught at it.

The cry came again, farther away, and fainter.

The young man stood still in the boat. His face was deadly white under the starlight. In his hand he held a great bough of orange-flowers, upon which the salt water sparkled like a frost of diamonds.

The cry died away like an echo, far out at sea.



I

THE sea lapped softly with a low, contented sound, against the plastered wall of the fish reserve. The little whisper of moving water made a music in the silence—a music strangely akin to the silence itself. A white sheet of moonlight smote the plaster until it shone like polished stone, and transfigured the little stucco Villa Mimosa to a fairy palace of glittering marble.

Below lay the blue bay, which an enchanted moon had sprinkled with diamonds. Pines came low down to the shore, stretching out twisted arms above the red promontories upon which they stood. It was all utterly still, utterly deserted. Far off, across the mysterious waters, the pale tower of the lighthouse held up its revolving fire to the night.

It was so still, so deserted, that the night seemed suddenly to have become a living thing, a strange creature breathing and palpitating under the magic radiance of the moon. A little shiver swept over the water—the silver footstep of a ghostly breeze—and the scent of the pines rose like a song into the air. A falling star dropped swiftly across the velvet of the sky. There were thousands of other stars still alight, but the one which had fallen seemed to leave a momentary darkness among them.

Chrysander lay in a long chair on the terrace

of the villa, with a cup of untasted coffee beside him, and a burnt cigarette between his careless fingers. It was characteristic of Chrysander that he would always forget his own comfort and convenience to look at something which had nothing to do with him. He let his coffee grow cold to stare at the moonlight; the cigarette went out between his fingers while he watched the falling star. These little details of nature had a passionate interest for him.

The star dropped. He held his breath for a moment and then released it in a long sigh. He lay back in the long chair, and his small ugly face took on an odd, fleeting semblance of beauty. The sea, the moonlight, the glory of the perfect night—for a moment these three things were reflected in his eyes.

He was very tired, for he had been travelling all day. Yet he did not care to move from the terrace, he could not turn away from the silver panorama of the night. It was probably very unwise, and he would be ill to-morrow, but he sat on with a sense of delicious recklessness. The magic of his first impression was worth a little after inconvenience, and Chrysander was used to paying for his pleasures, and paying at a high rate.

The night seemed breathing life into a world which revived visibly under her breath, as a flower revives in a shower. The pines seemed to grow greener in the shadow, the sea to grow

more radiant in the light. A fresh, cool sweetness, as of wet blossoms, crept into the still air. Chrysander's face changed a little as he watched. For months he had lain ill in Paris, the despair of his doctors, but perhaps he had never realised before how very near to death he had been. He knew all about it now. He was face to face with Life, and it made him a little afraid, as Death had never done. He had been face to face with death very often in his short, unhappy life, and it had lost its terrors for him.

He was still very weak, and the overmastering loveliness of all he saw brought sudden tears to his eyes, of which he did not feel at all ashamed. He threw away the burnt-out cigarette and thought of Madame de Maillane who had sent him here to grow strong again. Her face blotted out the moonlight for a second, and when it faded the moonlight, and the sea, and the dark pines seemed even more beautiful than before. Did they not too, in a measure, belong to Madame de Maillane?

The whole place breathed of her to this man who knew her so well. Her favourite colours reigned supreme in the rooms of the villa—her favourite flowers in the garden. The music she loved best lay in ordered confusion in the cabinet by the piano. Chrysander smiled rather sadly as he remembered that—so much of her music was his own. Perhaps she loved it because, though she did not know it, it was written

for her. He knew her taste. Consciously, or unconsciously, he wrote for her. It speaks well for her taste that the process had brought him fame.

But he did not care very much for that. What he cared infinitely more for was, that what he did should please her, if only a little. He would not have found consolation in the applause of the whole world, if to gain it he should forfeit hers.

It was a little pathetic, this devotion of the ugly, invalid genius to Madame de Maillane, with her splendid gaiety and beauty; but it was not without its uses, for without it, Paul Chrysander would not have been so great a man as he was, though it is possible he might have been a happier one. It was for Madame de Maillane that he wrote what he would not have taken the trouble to write for his own profit: it was for Madame de Maillane, perhaps, that he had struggled back to a painful existence when he had no desire to live. It was to please Madame de Maillane that he had accepted her offer of the Villa Mimosa, when not all the entreaties of his other friends would have persuaded him to leave Paris and betake himself to the South. He was very weary of Nice, of Cannes, of Mentone, and Monte Carlo—he had been to them all so often in a listless pursuit of the health which always eluded him. When he said so to Madame de Maillane she sprang up in her impulsive way,

and said that he must go to Hérista, to the Villa Mimosa, and that she and Louis would join him there later on.

Chrysander submitted, and allowed himself to be despatched to Hérista, though he did not expect to like it any more than he had liked Nice. But to-night, as he lay on the terrace, he began to think that he should like it far better than he had ever dared to expect.

The silence, the solitude of the place soothed him oddly. He began to think that he would do some work on his new opera after all—the new opera which had very narrowly escaped never being finished at all, except by its composer's death. Then, because even the new opera seemed a little out of place in this lovely desert, he put the thought out of his head and lay still with closed eyes.

The water below went on lap—lapping against the plaster wall. He could hear the small, soft swish of the wave, the little sobbing, sucking sound as it recoiled. A breath of air rustled the dry pine-boughs above his head. A sudden splash told him that a fish had leaped—probably in the reserve, for fish were not plentiful in the Rade d'Hérista. It was a big splash—it must have been a large fish, he told himself as he listened with closed eyes.

The splashing went on for a moment or two and then ceased. Probably the big fish was catching a smaller one for his supper. Chry-

sander lay and listened with languid interest. It seemed to him that, in the utter silence, he could hear something breathing in the water below.

Gradually, as he listened, a strange impression forced itself upon his mind that he was not alone, that some other human thing, which was yet not altogether human, was out there quite close to him, watching the moonlight as he had watched it, listening to the low lap of the wave. After a few moments the idea grew intolerable. A kind of terror crept over him, a terror as of some lurking wild beast, which he knew was waiting to spring upon him. He rose swiftly from his chair, and overturned his coffee-cup with a crash upon the terrace.

In his own strange mental agitation he hardly heard the crash. He went quickly along the terrace, down the path, and out on to the narrow promenade which ran all around the upper wall of the fish-reserve. He stood motionless, staring out at the sea.

The moonlight was so intense as to dazzle him. The broad sweep of the bay was empty, save for a brown fishing-boat rocking at anchor a few hundred yards away. Nearer in, perhaps fifty yards from the shore, a little swirl of moving water showed in the brightness of the moon.

Chrysander watched it, leaning over the green railing of the reserve. The terror had left him, and he thought only of the big fish. That must be it, making the best of its way out to sea.

He wondered idly what fish it could be, for the movement of the water showed him that it was a very large one.

The little patch of ruffled water went on moving swiftly across the smooth surface of the bay. Once Chrysander thought he saw the gleam of shining fins in the moonlight. Yes, it must be a very large fish. He turned upon his heel, went back to the terrace, picked up the fragments of the coffee-cup, and went to bed.

The terror had left him, but his nerves felt strained and on edge, and for a long while he could not sleep. Once, through the half-open window, he imagined that he heard a splash in the sea. Once he thought that he heard a sound of singing, very far away. Then he fell asleep, and the song, very faint and distant, murmured like an echo through his dreams.

II

WHEN Chrysander awoke next morning to sunshine, steaming coffee, and hot *brioques*, he had almost forgotten his odd sensations of the night before. He came down prepared for a day's work. The new opera hung insistently in his ears, and would not be denied. He wandered into the little music-room, the praises of which Madame de Maillane had chanted enthusiastically to him before he left Paris; he sat down at

the piano and fingered the polished keys. The temptation was irresistible, and he began to play, improvising as he went. A strange little melody fluttered to and fro in his brain, like a butterfly hovering over a flower. Chrysander set himself to the pleasant task of capturing it and bringing it down to earth, or, at least, to the keys of the piano.

It really seemed that Hérستا possessed some occult power of inspiration for him. For months he had not cared to play, much less to compose. Yet now the strange little air possessed him entirely. It seemed oddly familiar, too, as though he had heard it before.

Presently the woman who had waited on him the night before came noiselessly into the room with a cup of soup, which she set down on a little table at his elbow. Chrysander divined the orders of Madame de Maillane, and proceeded to drink the soup obediently. The woman moved to the window to let down the blind, and he watched her tall, thin figure as he drank. She was so thin that she looked almost like a skeleton as she stood adjusting the blind. When she turned he saw that her face was almost ghastly, with a pallor that showed even through her sunburn. Her large, dark eyes surveyed him with a cold, indifferent attention as she took the cup from his hand.

Chrysander had hardly spoken to her the night before. He wished her good-morning

now, and suggested that she must be Madame Vaillot. Her eyes dwelt upon him a shade less indifferently, he thought, as she replied. Yes, she was Madame Vaillot. She hoped he was not fatigued. She hoped they would be able to make him comfortable in Hérista.

Chrysander thought they would, and politely said so. "It is a beautiful place," he added, still watching those dark, indifferent eyes.

Her eyebrows rose for a second, and she gave her thin shoulders the least little shrug.

"Monsieur means the scenery? Oh yes, it is very beautiful. There are many artists here always. They come to paint the Rade d'Hérista. It is the colouring that is so fine, they say—the red rocks and the blue sea."

Her voice was high, clear, and expressive of the same utter indifference to all things in her eyes. It was clear that the scenery of Hérista had no charms for her.

Chrysander felt sociable after his hard work. He suggested that the boat in the bay probably belonged to one of the artists who came to paint the Rade d'Hérista.

She shook her head.

"No, monsieur. The boat with the orange sail, that belongs to Monsieur le Dauphin d'Hérista."

The odd title caught Chrysander's ear.

"The Dauphin d'Hérista! That is a very old name," he said, half to himself.

"There has always been a Dauphin d'Hérista," she said simply. "Monsieur Sarrasin is the last of them. He lives at the château across the bay. It was a fine place once, but now——" She shrugged her shoulders again, with a gesture that suggested that her bones would soon cut through her black bodice. "He is very poor, M. Sarrasin," she went on; "he lives as we do—he dresses like a peasant. He is a very great gentleman," she ended, looking dreamily into Chrysander's cup.

Chrysander began to feel interested in M. le Dauphin d'Hérista.

"He is young?"

"A little older than you, monsieur. Oh yes, he is young yet, and strong. He is like a giant, he is so tall. They are a fine family, the d'Hérista, and he is the last of them all."

Her voice dropped to a sad inflection over the last sentence. It was the second time she had made the remark, and Chrysander looked up at her, for it seemed to mean something. But her eyes were as cold as ever under her straight, black brows. She seemed to be thinking of something else—or, perhaps, of nothing at all.

"And who comes here besides artists?"

"Not very many people, monsieur. Pique-niques from Saint Raphaël—yes, sometimes; and they come to shoot, but not often now, for there is nothing left to shoot at, except magpies. Yes, there are *sangliers* in the forest, but they belong

to M. le Dauphin—nobody touches them. There are rabbits, of course. Down in the village they net them—it is not allowed, but what would you? One must live. And the rabbits are M. Sarrasin's, and he is not hard upon poor people."

"He is popular?"

"Popular." She repeated the word as though it was strange to her. "He is M. le Dauphin," she said in a final tone.

"You have fish here too, I suppose?"

She lifted her eyes suddenly with a curious flash in their depths. Chrysander told himself afterward that he would have sworn she was startled. Yet how could such a simple question have startled her?

"There are a very few," she said curtly. "*Rouget* and *rascasse*—there is nothing else. And *langouste* in the reserve. Monsieur will perhaps take a *langouste* at *déjeuner*? There is one fresh boiled this morning."

Chrysander said that he should be very happy to eat the fresh-boiled *langouste*. He was still watching Madame Vaillot's dark, impassive face. Below the surface of its impenetrability he thought he detected a faint agitation.

"There must be large fish in the bay," he said. "I saw one last night swimming across toward the lighthouse. It was some way off, but I am sure it was a good size."

Her eyes dropped suddenly under his gaze,

and he saw the pallor of her face grow even more intense and noticeable than before.

"A porpoise, no doubt," she said, in a hurried voice. "They come sometimes into the bay. If there is nothing else that monsieur wants, I will go."

She went out quickly. Chrysander thought that he heard the cup rattle as though her hand shook.

Then he turned to the piano and went on with his improvisation. Again the air came singing into his head, sweet, and strange, and a little sad. Suddenly he remembered when he had heard it before—it was the song that had come up to him from the cool, moonlit waters the night before—the song which had whispered to him in his dreams. He had thought at the time it was only a dream itself—now he was sure that he had really heard it, that some one had really sung it, out in the magical light and shadow of the southern night.

Somehow the certainty drove away his inspiration. He felt vaguely curious, vaguely troubled.

He shut the piano, took his hat, and went out into the blazing sunlight of the garden.

III

THE Villa Mimosa stood well out toward the right horn of the curving bay; and opposite, in precisely the same position toward the left horn, stood a square grey building with round, pointed towers which Chrysander guessed must be the Château d'Hérista, the home of the Dauphin.

He looked across at it as he went out on the terrace. The clear, cordial fire of a southern sun was beating down upon the silver-grey mimosa trees with their feathery leaves and tiny golden blossoms. Roses were in full bloom in the carefully watered beds. Chrysander picked one and put it in his coat as he stood there, regardless of the good-humoured scowl assumed by Madame Vaillot's big and bearded husband, who was at work among the flowers a few yards away. The big and bearded husband saluted him with a breezy flourish of his broad country hat, and a gay "*Bonjour, monsieur,*" which shook the quiet air with startled vibrations, like the sudden explosion of a shell. Chrysander returned the salutation, and went down toward the sea. He was not in the humour for more conversation just then.

The brown fishing-boat of M. le Dauphin d'Hérista was drifting leisurely toward the villa across the peacock-blue bay. It seemed to be making for the little white landing-stage below. Chrysander hesitated for a moment, and then

went down on to the landing-stage and waited for the coming boat.

It came nearer and nearer. He could make out a tall figure in blue linen bending over a basket in the stern. Presently the orange-coloured sail sank down with a dull, flapping sound. The tall blue figure stood up as the boat grated against the landing-stage.

Instinctively Chrysander took off his hat: firstly, to the Dauphin d'Hérista—secondly, to the most magnificent specimen of humanity it had ever been his lot to encounter.

The blue figure gravely removed his coarse straw hat, and stood regarding him for a moment in silence. Sarrasin, Dauphin d'Hérista, stood considerably over six feet. He towered up against the blue and golden background of the sea and the sunlight, like a veritable giant, as Madame Vaillot had said. Poor Chrysander felt suddenly very small beside the last of the d'Hérista.

M. le Dauphin replaced his hat and spoke.

"I heard there was a visitor at the villa," he said. "I thought perhaps some fish might be wanted. This is just caught. You would like some, monsieur?"

He spoke gravely, in a deep, musical voice, which was like the ripple of the sea to Chrysander's ears. Turning with a swift, easy movement, he swung the heavy basket out upon the landing-stage. Chrysander saw the gleam of

wet, shining scales within. D'Hérستا dived with one hand among the struggling fish, and brought out a fat *rouget*, pink as a fading sunset, which he held up with an appreciative air.

"They are very good just now," he said. "I will charge you two francs the *kilo*, and that is not dear, for this is a very fine one. Madame Vaillot knows how to cook them. I will speak to her about the sauce which is a speciality of hers. Here is another. I suppose you would not like the pair, monsieur?"

Chrysander hurriedly agreed to the pair. It was impossible to bargain with this splendid personage, who looked so regal in his blue linen, and spoke with such a magnificent air of charging two francs a *kilo* for his fish. Chrysander felt that the pair of *rougets* was certainly not dear, if its price included the pleasure of becoming acquainted with the Dauphin d'Hérستا.

That individual put back his basket into the boat, took the flapping *rougets* by their two tails, and stepped out upon the landing-stage to fasten up the boat. Then he turned to Chrysander.

"Shall we go up to Madame Vaillot and weigh the fish?" he said, in his deep voice. "Also—if you will pardon the remark—you should not stand there in the sun in that hat. It is not broad enough, and the sun is strong to-day. You should wear a country hat, like this." He touched the battered brim as he followed Chrysander up the path. He had assumed a pro-

tective air, which was a little amusing, Chrysander thought, and also exceedingly engaging. It was really not at all unpleasant to be told what one ought to do by this fisher-prince.

They reached the kitchen of the villa. Madame Vaillot came out with an exclamation of surprise. She was almost reverential in her demeanour toward the Dauphin. She waxed enthusiastic over the size and beauty of the fish. It was as though she was weighing out gold and pearls with her rusty weights and scales.

D'Hérستا received his six francs with a serene courtesy before which Chrysander stood dumb. It seemed a very odd thing to him to see this man, who was so evidently a very great man indeed, selling his fish at so much a *kilo*, with an apparent unconsciousness that there was anything the least unusual in the transaction. He remembered many impoverished scions of great houses, and d'Hérستا's calm acceptance of his poverty contrasted very strongly with their efforts to disguise the fact that they were not all millionaires.

The six francs had been paid, and d'Hérستا was preparing to depart, in his leisurely, unhurried way. Chrysander followed him down to the landing-stage, expressing his admiration of Hérستا. The Dauphin nodded gravely to all he said.

"Yes, it is very beautiful—to you." There was a slight shade of bitterness in his tone.

"You see only the best side of it, monsieur. But there is another side. My people"—he spoke possessively, with the same fine air of protection which had so struck Chrysander when applied to himself—"my people are terribly poor. In any other country they would not be able to live at all, but here one has always the sun, and that is a great deal. Unfortunately, too, I am not in a position to do much for them, for, as you see, I live as they do. I do not care for myself, but it is sometimes hard to stand by and do nothing when there is so much to be done." He broke off abruptly, as though the conversation had taken a turn distasteful to him, and took off his hat. "Good-day, monsieur. I will remember that you like *rouget*."

Something touched Chrysander. He looked for an instant into the eyes of the Dauphin d'Hérستا, and held out his hand.

"Will you come and see me?" he said timidly. "I shall be delighted if you will. I shall look upon it as a great honour, M. le Dauphin."

D'Hérستا looked back at him for a moment with his grave, dark eyes, as though seeking to discover what motive his companion had for this sudden invitation. Apparently he was satisfied with it, for he took Chrysander's hand and smiled.

"I shall be delighted to come," he said simply, "and I hope to see you at the château. It

was a fine old place once, and it is worth seeing even now. *Au revoir*, M. Chrysander."

He stepped into his boat and departed. Chrysander stood for a long time on the landing-stage watching the orange sail glide across the bay. Then he returned to *déjeuner* on *langouste* and *rouget*, haunted by the memory of the man who had caught him.

For the rest of the day he lounged in the garden with a book on his knee which he did not read. Books seemed a little out of place in Hérista—he wondered whether the Dauphin possessed any in his ruined castle. It was probable that he was not of a very literary turn of mind. Perhaps he hardly knew how to write his own name.

But in that Chrysander was wrong. Late that evening Madame Vaillot, pale and spectral as usual, brought him a neat flat parcel, which, when unfastened, developed into a country hat very elaborately plaited in blue and white straw. Chrysander fingered it in some perplexity, and Madame Vaillot permitted herself to explain.

"It is from the château," she said. "M. le Dauphin makes them sometimes—he is a fine worker, and round here one gives a high price for his work." She glanced at Chrysander a little curiously. "It is a great compliment to monsieur."

Chrysander turned the hat to and fro. On one corner was pinned—wonder of wonders—a

visiting card, yellow with age, and smelling of lavender: and upon it was written in a small resolute hand, "With the compliments of the Dauphin d'Hérista."

IV

THAT night Chrysander woke after an hour or two's sleep—woke with a strange sense of having been roused by a sudden call. For a moment he listened, but all was silent. Then he rose, went to the window, and looked out at the bay.

All was still and peaceful. Half way across the blue crescent the Dauphin's boat with its vivid sail rocked softly upon the calm waters. A light in the bow cast a great patch of flaring radiance upon the sea, the reflection of which reached in a long line of liquid flame to the shore. D'Hérista was evidently fishing.

All was still—and yet—Chrysander held his breath for a second.

Some one was singing, very far away—singing the strange little air which had haunted him all day—in a clear, high voice, which had in it a curious want of expression, a curious coldness, as though nothing on earth mattered to the singer. It was a woman's voice, or a child's—perhaps a very young girl's—a voice of wonderful volume and *timbre*, yet cold and indifferent as ice.

Chrysander listened. There was something unnatural, something almost horrible in the absolute monotony of that distant voice. It seemed almost like a sound ground out by a machine.

Presently it ceased. About the same time the orange sail began to drift homeward across the bay. The light at the prow was extinguished, and the sails, in the gloom, looked like the moving wings of some great sea-bird. Finally, it vanished into the shadow of the rocks under the Château d'Hérista.

Chrysander lingered at the window, drinking in the cool night air. Presently his eye fell upon a little patch of ruffled water moving across the silver surface of the sea. It was coming toward the villa, moving swiftly with a regular flash under the moonlight as of wet fins.

He watched eagerly. The moving patch came nearer and nearer to the shore. Then it disappeared in the shadow of the red rocks and he saw it no more.

Disappointed, he turned away and went back to bed. Just as he was falling asleep a light step sounded on the terrace beneath his window.

He went to sleep and dreamed that the Dauphin d'Hérista took him for a sail in his boat, and, when midway out in the Rade, changed into an immense *rouget* wearing a blue and white straw hat, presented him with a yellow visiting-card, and swam away across the bay.

V

WHEN Chrysander went out into the garden next morning he found the Dauphin's boat waiting for him, and the Dauphin himself sitting on the end of the landing-stage with his hat tilted over his eyes, and his grave gaze fixed upon the sea. He rose at Chrysander's approach.

"I thought you would come for a sail to-day," he said. "There is no fishing to be done, and we shall have a thunderstorm this afternoon." He spoke with an absolute certainty as to the proceedings of the weather which rather suggested that he made its arrangements himself. He glanced at Chrysander's head-covering and laughed. "So you find it comfortable? Yes, they are useful things in this blazing sunshine. But this is really not hot weather to us, though it may seem so to you who are not used to it. You do not have this sun in Paris—no? Ah! Hérista is sometimes not the worst place in the world."

He spoke a little sadly, and there was a shadow on his dark face as he helped Chrysander into the boat.

"You do not like Hérista?"

"Like it?" He looked up in genuine surprise. "I love it," he said simply. "I think I could not live anywhere else. The sea and the sun—those two things are everything to me, for, you see, I have nothing else in the world. Oh!

I love Hérista, yet I can not but see it as it is. It is very dark here sometimes, M. Chrysander, for all the sunshine. We have our thunderstorms—yes.” He laughed and glanced at the blue sky. “Did you sleep well last night?” he added, with one of his swift changes of the subject under discussion.

Chrysander remembered his dream, and laughed too.

“No—I had disturbing visions of you, M. le Dauphin.”

“Of me? I must be an uninteresting person to dream about,” d’Hérista said quietly.

“Not at all. You were so distractingly interesting that I woke up. Oh—I meant to ask you if there is any one who sings about here.”

D’Hérista was occupied with the orange sail, and Chrysander could not see his face. He paused for a moment before he answered.

“Do you mean if there is any one who sings well—as you would call it? Of course, there are people who sing, everywhere.”

“But not people who sing like that. It is a girl’s voice. It is extraordinarily beautiful and extraordinarily——”

He broke off: it was difficult to explain what he meant to the Dauphin, who certainly would not understand.

“Yes?” said d’Hérista in his quiet, deep tones.

“It is not easy to say what I mean. It is

a voice like ice—there is no sort of expression in it. And yet it is beautiful. But it is—it is the voice of a person without a soul,” Chrysander ended, in a final desperate effort to explain what he meant.

D’Hérستا smiled a little.

“Do you believe there are really people without souls?” he said rather drily.

“Are there not people without hearts?” Chrysander retorted.

D’Hérستا looked thoughtfully at the sea.

“Certainly—but the people who have no hearts are those who have no souls,” he said. “It is the same thing. And they really exist, though it sounds peculiar to say so.”

“Then you have heard the voice?”

D’Hérستا waited for the fraction of a second. He did not seem a person given to hesitation, and yet Chrysander was sure that for some reason he hesitated before he replied.

“I suppose it was Conca,” he said at last, rather vaguely. “She is Madame Vaillot’s niece, and she is supposed to have a wonderful voice. I do not know anything about these things, but of course you do, and very likely the voice was hers, as you say it was beautiful.”

“But, does this Conca sing at night?”

D’Hérستا’s broad shoulders rose slightly beneath his blue shirt.

“Conca is a curious person,” he said briefly.

Chrysander was silent for a moment. He

was not by nature suspicious, but it struck him that there must be some mystery about Conca and her voice.

"You are often out fishing at night, I suppose?" he asked presently.

"Yes."

"And you often hear this girl singing?"

D'Hérستا's shoulders rose again.

"Oh, often. But I have no more ear than a mule, M. Chrysander, and I assure you it does not interest me in the least. Not but what I am glad to hear Conca singing, because when she sings there is always plenty of fish. I think she charms the fish into the bay."

He laughed and watched the orange sail flap out to the wind as the boat tacked landward. Then he said, with another of his abrupt changes of the conversation, "You are a great friend of Madame la Duchesse de Maillane?"

For the rest of the morning they talked of other things, and of Paris, which the Dauphin had never seen, and which he did not in the least desire to see. Chrysander was fond of Paris and waxed enthusiastic in its praises; and d'Hérستا listened to him with a tolerant smile.

"Once when I was very young," he said, "I wanted to see that; but I have grown wiser now. The sea, and the sun—that is enough for me. I should not be happy in a life where one's simplest pleasures are artificial"—he laughed again softly, and his eyes rested on the blue horizon

with a sudden light in their sombre depths. "I am too big for Paris, I think," he said, in a gayer tone; "I should take up too much room. I should never be content without my boat, and my grey old ruin there, and my dark woods, and my friend the sea."

He lay back in the stern, with the strong sunlight beating upon his upturned face. He never lifted a hand to shade his eyes from the glare. The orange sail flapping out to the wind as the boat heeled over made a gorgeous background to the splendid blue figure, and the dark features under the picturesque hat. Chrysander felt suddenly how small were the things of which he had been speaking—how little they must mean to this magnificent giant, with his great name and his ruined castle, who sold fish at two francs the *kilo*, and looked and spoke like a prince.

"How I should love to paint you, if I were an artist!" he exclaimed fervently.

D'Hérستا made an expressive grimace.

"No one has ever painted me," he said. "I could not sit still long enough for that, even to please you. But you may put me in an opera," he added politely, "and you may dream about me as much as you like."

"And about Conca, too?" Chrysander asked, smiling.

A shadow fell across the face he was watching—a shadow faint and indefinable as the gloom a summer cloud casts on the earth.

"Conca? Ah, that is another matter," the Dauphin said, rather coldly. "I should not advise you to dream about Conca unless you are a fish, and wish to be caught. If you encourage Conca in your dreams, M. Chrysander, I shall have the pleasure of hauling you up in my nets some night, and that is a privilege for which I have not the least desire."

With which sufficiently enigmatical speech he put the boat's head to the land, and relapsed into a silence which Chrysander did not succeed in breaking until they reached the shore. And then the Dauphin d'Hérista would only converse upon the flavour of his favourite *rouget*, and he was deaf to all questions concerning Conca or her voice.

VI

THE thunderstorm duly arrived in the afternoon, just as the Dauphin had said. For hours the villa was shaken by terrific detonations, and the lightning played in blue and lilac flames across the darkened bay. Chrysander drew all the blinds down in his room and lay down, for it was utterly impossible to do anything, such was the violence of the storm. The rain beat in great drops like bullets against the closed shutters, and the pale, livid fires of the lightning made a ghastly twilight in the room. Through the open door Chrysander could hear Monsieur

Vaillot, in the kitchen, bewailing the damage which was sure to ensue to his beloved plants. Then the roll of the thunder extinguished all lesser sounds in a peal of majestic fury, which died away in a patter of tropical rain.

When at last peace was restored, Chrysander went out upon the terrace to breathe the clear, cool air. It was already dark, for the storm had lasted all the afternoon. A few drops of rain fell with a soft, refreshing sound upon the dripping leaves. The air was sweet with the smell of soaking earth, of flowers pouring out their perfume to the delicious damp. A perpetual flicker of lightning, of a pale lilac colour, played still in the sky, throwing up every twig of the mimosa trees in sharp relief. The effect of this unbroken illumination was so singular, and so beautiful, that Chrysander stood for a long time gazing at it, oblivious of the light rain, and heedless of the fact that Madame Vaillot had twice called him in to dinner.

Suddenly, in the semi-darkness, he experienced once more that strange sense of a presence near him which he had felt on the first night of his arrival. It was even more strongly marked than on the first occasion, but some of the horror was gone. He turned, dazzled by staring at the lightning, and for a moment could see nothing.

Then, gradually, he made out a figure standing so close to him that he could have touched it if he had chosen to hold out his hand. It was

the figure of a girl, dressed in some thin, dark stuff, soaked through and through with rain, which clung limply to her small, delicate limbs. She was so slight that, in her wet dress, she looked almost like a shadow. Her long hair, of a pale golden colour which gleamed dully in the flicker of the lightning, hung in heavy masses upon her shoulders. Chrysander saw that it was as wet as her dress, and that little streams of water were dripping from it upon the gravel of the terrace. Her face shone like a white flower in the gloom, and the wide, clear eyes were fixed with an oddly speculative expression upon himself. It was the frank, unconscious stare of a child, and yet he shrank before it. There was something cold and repellent, something almost inhuman, in this intent, silent gaze, which never faltered before his own.

For a moment they stood staring at each other. Then Madame Vaillot's voice, surprised and angry, broke in upon their silence.

"Conca!" she cried. "Conca!"

The girl turned and went in through the doorway, moving silently as a spectre on her small bare feet.

VII

CHRYSANDER came downstairs on the morning after the storm with a curious feeling of expectation which almost amounted to excite-

ment. A new element had entered the Villa Mimosa.

He went out upon the terrace, but it was empty of everything save the flowers and the sunlight. He made his way into the red-tiled kitchen on the plea of giving some trifling direction to Madame Vaillot. She was peeling potatoes by the window, bending over the long white table until her sharp elbows and shoulders seemed on the point of making holes in her dress. Conca was nowhere to be seen.

Madame Vaillot looked up indifferently as he entered, and gave him a brief good-morning in her cold, level voice. She heard his directions in uninterested silence, made a vague gesture of agreement, and went on with her work. Her face, seen in the strong glare of light which fell through the open window, seemed a little paler than usual, and he imagined that he detected faint blue rings round her impassive dark eyes.

"You do not look very well this morning," Chrysander said kindly. "I am afraid I have been giving you a great deal of trouble. But now your niece has come back you will not have so much to do."

The woman looked up at him quickly from the half-peeled potato in her hand.

"My niece?" she repeated vaguely. Then a grim little smile crossed her face. "Oh, you mean Conca, monsieur? Yes, to be sure, she

has come back, but she is not much of a help to me."

Chrysander preserved an expectant silence. She took up another potato and went on speaking.

"No, indeed, m'sieu'. I would rather be without Conca's help, for what she does she does so badly that it is mostly spoilt. And likely as not, she is off again now, splashing about among the rocks, getting herself wet, and ruining every stitch of clothing she has on. That is always the way with Conca. Fishing, and swimming, always in the water from daybreak till dark—she will work as hard as you please at anything of that kind. But as for helping me about the house——!"

She broke off with an expressive shrug, and dropped the last potato into the brown earthenware bowl on the table and carried it away. Chrysander felt himself dismissed, and went off to his music-room to work at the third act of his belated opera.

He worked for an hour or two steadily, regardless of the increasing heat. Then he opened the piano and proceeded to try the effect of what he had done. He was half way through the act when it struck him that some one had entered the room. Turning on the revolving music-stool, without taking his hands from the keys, he found himself face to face with the girl, Conca.

In outward appearance she was certainly a

good deal more respectable-looking—perhaps more commonplace—than she had seemed the night before. Her black dress was dry, her fair hair was fastened with an amber comb on the top of her small head. Her pale, almost childish face was lifted with an expression of attention so intense as to be almost painful, and a great wonder shone in her dilated eyes.

Chrysander went on playing mechanically, and watched her over his shoulder. She appeared to be quite unconscious of his presence, wholly absorbed in his music. As he played she came nearer and nearer, moving like a person mesmerised who obeys a force outside himself.

Suddenly Chrysander took his hands from the keys and pushed his music-stool back with a jerk. There had come upon him again that strange sense of horror which he had felt that first night upon the terrace—a blind, unreasoning fear, an incomprehensible physical repulsion from some one, or something, which filled him with loathing—something, the mere proximity of which seemed to strike a deadly chill to his heart. His hands were shaking, as though with cold, as he lifted them from the keys.

A moment later he would have given a good deal to have kept his self-command. Conca started violently, as though the cessation of the music had wakened her from sleep. Her eyes fell upon *him* with a startled expression, and she

made a quick little movement, as though to fly from the room.

Chrysander rose from the piano.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle."

She looked at him for a moment with an expression he remembered seeing once in the eyes of a cat caught in a trap—an expression of fear, of hatred almost, of wild, furious desire to escape. Chrysander realised that, for the time at least, she was quite as terribly afraid as he had been. But of what had they both been afraid? he asked himself. What could be the cause of this apparently inexplicable terror?

"Have you never heard any music before?" he said, smiling at her reassuringly. "I thought it was you, mademoiselle, whom I heard singing the other night, after I arrived."

She found her voice with amazing rapidity.

"I, m'sieu'? It could not have been I, for I never sing at night—I never go out at night. I—I am afraid."

Chrysander knew it was a lie, the moment that the words passed her lips. She spoke with her small face lifted, and no shadow of hesitation in her large limpid eyes. They were odd eyes, Chrysander thought as he looked at them. They had a strange effect of depth of liquid, crystalline clearness—the clearness of water lying motionless under a strong light. But she was lying—of that he felt quite sure. Yet where *was the motive* for the lie?

"You must sing to me," he said, with a mental effort to dismiss his disgust, "if not at night, then by day."

She looked at him for a moment more. Her eyes had lost their limpid look. They seemed grey and cloudy, as though a mist had floated across their depths.

"I will sing to you now, if you like," she said simply.

Chrysander could not quite suppress a smile. Was this untaught peasant girl so proud of her music that she was anxious to sing to *him*, one of the great musicians of the day?

"I shall be charmed," he said, with faint irony.

A moment later she began to sing in her clear, high voice, utterly expressionless, utterly monotonous, as devoid of all human feeling as the sound of the sea on a still day—to sing a strange, monotonous chant, without words, without any marked air which could arrest the ear. It seemed the music of a dream, sad and yet passionless, cold and yet full of an indefinable longing, an inexpressible, inarticulate desire for something which could never be attained. The smooth rise and fall of the clear, full notes held the crystal purity of ice. The little room appeared to be too small for the sound, the world itself seemed too narrow to contain that high, still sweetness, which had in it something akin to the stars, to the unsounded sadness of the

sea, to the great, calm, relentless forces of Nature which no human passion may measure or control.

Chrysander, listening to that voice, felt himself carried away, as though by the strong wings of the wind. The magic of it seized upon him body and soul. It was the voice of the sea, of the dumb red rocks under the mournful pines, of the white gulls sweeping southward to the horizon which knew no end. It was the music of the clouds, and the sunset, of the pink skies from which the sun had withdrawn, of the falling night wet with dew and sweet with the scent of southernwood and thyme, and the smell of seaweed tossed upon the shore. It was the white enchantment of the moonlight changing earth to a fairyland of dim romance. . . . The walls of the little music-room seemed to fall away, letting in the smell of the seaweed, the magic of the glittering Mediterranean, the cool airs of the night. . . .

Conca's song ceased as abruptly as it had begun. A mist seemed to clear away from before Chrysander's eyes. He came back with a start to the things of real life—to the sunlight falling golden through the chinks in the closed shutters, to the short laugh of a seamew crossing the bay. He felt dazed and stupid, and his heart was beating quickly. The walls of the music-room seemed to be revolving round him as he stood and looked at Conca.

Her pale, delicate face remained absolutely

unmoved. Her eyes shone grey and dreamy under their long lashes. A strange little smile curved the soft lines of her lips.

Chrysander made a swift step forward, took her hand, and kissed it.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in a broken voice, "you are a genius!"

The smile deepened on her lips. Her hand, small, and cold as ice, lay passive in his. Her eyes, lifted wide and shining to his own, seemed to hold a veiled flame in their unfathomable depths.

A voice sounded on the terrace—Madame Vaillot's voice.

"Conca!—Conca!"

Chrysander dropped the small, cold hand. The girl looked at him for an instant more. Then she obeyed the summons in her swift, silent way. A gleam of sunlight caught her high amber comb and changed it to gold as she slipped noiselessly from the room.

VIII

FOR a day or two after his interview with Conca, Chrysander lay on the sofa in the cool little *salon*, weak and shaken, almost unable to move. Madame Vaillot diagnosed his case as a touch of the sun, and nursed him with a kind of cold, impartial devotion. Monsieur Vaillot

brought him a great bunch of roses. The Dauphin d'Hérista, hearing of his illness, came and sat for an hour beside his sofa, saying very little, and watching him with a curious, speculative expression in his grave eyes. Conca never came near the *salon* and its occupant. Her voice was silent. Perhaps she had been bidden not to sing because he was ill.

While he lay in the darkened room he received a letter from Madame de Maillane—one of those kindly, charming epistles for which she was famous among her friends. She was delighted that he liked Hérista, that Madame Vaillet made him so comfortable. She was sure he would soon be better, and she hoped that he was not very dull. As soon as she could tear Louis away from his beloved Paris she would come down herself to see how he was getting on. She missed him very much. She had been to a dance last night in a pale green dress spangled with diamonds, which she was sure he would have thought artistic—and so on for several pages.

Then, at the end, came a little paragraph which forced a smile from him in spite of himself.

"You say that you have met the Dauphin d'Hérista. My dear Paul, pray do not have anything to do with that man. He is as handsome as a picture, and just the sort of person you admire, but I am sure that he has the evil eye.

Will you laugh at me, and call me superstitious? Well, I am a woman, and all women are superstitious, though they do not all admit it. I am sure the Dauphin d'Hérista has the evil eye. There is a legend that one of the old d'Héristas sold all his race to the devil. I believe it is true! Do not have anything to do with him, and do not eat his *rougets* or you will be ill."

Chrysander put down the letter and laughed outright. When Madame Vaillot came in with his soup he asked her a question.

"Madame, has the Dauphin d'Hérista the evil eye?"

She started, and put down the cup quickly beside him.

"How should I know, m'sieu'? The Dauphin has very good eyes, it seems to me. He sees as much as most people. Perhaps that is why foolish persons say that he has the evil eye."

"Then there are really people who say so?"

"There are always people who are fools, m'sieu'. Yes, the Italians here—the workmen at the quarry—certainly say so. They say there is a devil in the Château d'Hérista, too. They have seen it at night when they are fishing. It is a devil which eats fish!" She laughed mirthlessly. "Well, I have never seen it, and I do not suppose I ever shall. I do not drink enough wine, no doubt."

She went out, and Chrysander lay thinking

with the letter in his hand. So there was a devil at the Château d'Hérista? Well, the Dauphin had asked him, over there—he would go and see. And, if possible, he would see the devil, too.

IX

THE power of the sun was beginning to decline, and a grateful freshness crept softly into the air. Chrysander had just set down the cup of tea Madame Vaillot had brought him, when a step sounded on the terrace. A moment later the Dauphin d'Hérista entered the room.

"It is a fine afternoon," he said prosaically. I thought perhaps you would come over to the château."

Chrysander expressed himself as delighted. D'Hérista nodded in silent acknowledgment of his companion's pleasure; and sat down by the sofa.

"You will have some tea?"

"My mother used to drink tea," d'Hérista said. "I remember tasting it when I was about five years old—I have never had any since. No, thank you, I am not thirsty. You do not look very well to-day."

"I am better than I was. That touch of the sun——"

"These people here put down everything to the sun," d'Hérista said, with a shrug. "The

sun is a very useful scapegoat in Hérستا. You have been doing too much. It can not be good for one's health to write music, any more than it is to listen to it when it is written."

"Why not?" asked Chrysander, laughing.

"Oh, it seems an unhealthy kind of occupation to me. It must be bad for one's brain. You are always thinking, thinking, and it is not a good thing to think too much. M. de Curé here has a saying, that when a man thinks too much the devil looks over his shoulder."

Chrysander laughed. D'Hérستا, on the contrary, remained quite grave.

"Why do you laugh at that? No doubt it is true—in Hérستا. It may be different in Paris. But here, in the forests, and on the sea, there is room for the devil if he chooses to come. But I suppose you do not believe in devils."

Chrysander stopped laughing.

"I do not know," he said vaguely. "Are they not a little out of date?"

"Oh, no doubt—in Paris. But because the devil is not a fashionable personage in Paris, my dear M. Chrysander, it does not follow that he is a nonentity in Hérستا."

"The devil is fashionable enough in Paris," Chrysander said, "but one does not believe in him any the more."

"No? Well, that seems to me merely a proof that Paris has less sense than Hérستا. It

is rather absurd to be afraid of what you do not believe to exist."

"I am not afraid," said Chrysander quickly.

"No?" d'Hérista said again. "Well, you are braver than I am, for I am certainly afraid of the devil, and so was my father before me. We d'Héristas are always afraid of the devil, though we are supposed to have sold ourselves to him, and to have the evil eye."

"Do you believe in the evil eye?"

"Certainly," d'Hérista said calmly. "Of course I do. I have known people who had it, and I am not quite sure that I have not really got it myself. There are plenty of people about here who have it, at any rate. There is Conca, for instance."

"Conca?" Chrysander exclaimed, in genuine surprise.

"Yes, Conca. She certainly has the evil eye. Do you suppose she would not have been married before now, a pretty girl like that, if the men in Hérista were not all afraid to marry her?"

"What an extraordinary idea!"

"It is extraordinary enough, if you like," d'Hérista said, "but it is quite true. Ask M. de Curé. He is charity itself, but he will not tell you that Conca has not the evil eye. And he probably is not quite certain in his own mind that I have not got it too!"

He laughed. The possession of the evil

eye did not seem to have very much effect upon him.

"I should have thought you would not have liked the idea," Chrysander said curiously.

"I do not like it. I put up with it because there is nothing else to be done. Now we will go, if you are ready to trust yourself with me, and to brave the dangers of the devil-haunted Château d'Hérستا."

"I would trust myself with you anywhere," Chrysander said, smiling across at the tall blue figure.

The Dauphin bent his head.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "I will not abuse your confidence."

They left the villa and went down to the boat. Soon they were half across the Rade, skimming lightly before the breeze. The orange sails bore them up over the blue, dancing waves, like the wings of a great yellow butterfly. A twinkle of white foam marked their path across the bay, and the wind sang gaily in their ears.

"It looks very different at night," Chrysander said suddenly.

D'Hérستا glanced up at him rather sharply.

"People should sleep at night, and not look at it," he remarked, "unless they have to go fishing, like myself. And I would much rather be in my bed, I can assure you."

"But it is so beautiful at night! You must take me fishing some evening too."

"I do not know whether I could," d'Hérستا answered coldly. "The fish do not care for strangers. I would rather take you fishing by day."

Chrysander was silent. He felt sure that the Dauphin, for some reason or other, did not wish to take him on any of his nocturnal fishing expeditions, and he wondered why. Madame Vaillot's words came suddenly into his head: "The Italians . . . say there is a devil in the Château d'Hérستا. They have seen it at night when they were fishing. It is a devil which eats fish!" Did the Dauphin fear that he, too, would see the devil? The idea was too absurd.

"Here we are at the château," said d'Hérستا's quiet, deep voice in his ear.

Yes, the idea was certainly too absurd: but it haunted him, all the same.

X

THE orange sail flapped down into the boat, and the boat glided with a harsh, grating sound against the narrow landing-place cut in the rock upon which the château was built. Rough steps, irregular, and green with sea-grass, climbed to the battlemented terrace above. The quaint, peaked towers, shaped like so many sugar-loaves, seemed to hang in the air immediately over their heads, throwing a deep shad-

ow upon the blue of the sea—a shadow cold and sinister, in which Chrysander shrank back with an involuntary shiver.

“It is always cold here,” the Dauphin said, looking at him, as he moored the boat by a rope to an iron ring fastened in the wall. “On the hottest day there is always a shadow under the terrace. But you will find the sunshine up above.”

He led the way up the rough steps, and they emerged upon a broad terrace flanked at either end by a small, pointed watch-tower. In the centre was the great entrance of the castle, facing seaward, crowned behind with the grey stone keep, on the summit of which a faded blue and golden flag fluttered in the breeze.

“In your honour,” the Dauphin said briefly, as he pointed to it.

He led the way to the great entrance, over which was the gigantic figure of a man holding a scimitar cut in low relief upon the stone wall.

“A namesake of mine,” the Dauphin remarked, pointing once more. “The founder of our house is supposed to be a Moor from Spain who fell in love with the beautiful Azalais d’Auvergne, daughter of one of the Dauphins d’Auvergne, and renounced his country and his faith in order to marry her. The Dauphin d’Auvergne gave him some of his lands, and he served the king of that day so well in the wars that he was at last named Dauphin d’Hérista.

And to this day the elder son of our family has always borne the name of Sarrasin in his honour."

They went in through the wicket cut in the great gate. Beyond lay the great hall of the castle, dark and still, lighted by narrow lancet windows through which long golden shafts of sunlight fell upon its gloom. The walls were damp and bare, and the furniture consisted solely of a long oak table and two or three curiously shaped chairs; yet the place had still an air of dignity even in its decay. High above, among the mouldering rafters, hung here and there a tattered banner, relic of some ancient fight which had survived the assaults of time. Upon the table stood a great silver beaker, and two drinking-goblets of fine old silver-gilt.

The Dauphin filled both goblets, and handed one to Chrysander while he lifted the other in the air.

"My house is not what it was once," he said, with a grave smile, "but I am glad to see you in it, M. Chrysander, and I hope you will always consider it very much at your disposal. I bid you welcome to the Château d'Hérista!"

To the end of his life Chrysander never forgot that scene, so impressive, so picturesque in its simplicity. The great dark hall lighted by shafts of sunlight—the tattered banners high above—the background of bare, damp walls, of ruin and decay; and in the midst, the gigantic

figure of Sarrasin d'Hérستا, splendid in his coarse blue linen, with the silver goblet in his hand—the last of the noble house, standing, clad in a peasant's garb, in the castle which had sheltered his ancestors for centuries, and which had never known a lord more worthy than himself.

XI

THE château was terribly in need of repair. Any building less solidly constructed in the beginning would never have stood so long, but the immense thickness of the walls, the massive strength of the masonry, kept the noble old ruin together in a condition of comparative safety. Most of the pointed watch-towers were given over to bats and birds, and had not been entered, the Dauphin told his guest, within the memory of any one in Hérستا. But the keep was still habitable, and it was here that d'Hérستا took his visitor when they had explored the rest of the castle.

"This is my part of the house," he said, as he led the way up the narrow stairs with its deeply cut steps. "It is a long way up, but there is a view, as you will see, that is worth a little exercise. Also, one can get away by oneself and forget that there is any one else in the world." He laughed as he opened the door at the head of the stair and stood aside that Chrysander

might enter the room. "Now, M. Chrysander, you are at the highest point of Hérista, unless you climb the hills and get up to the top of Cap Roux."

Chrysander stood breathless. Here, at last, was a fitting framework for the Dauphin d'Hérista.

The room was very large and quite square, and was lighted by long, deep windows placed at intervals of a few feet from each other on two sides. The walls themselves were hidden by faded tapestry of great age, and probably priceless value. The stone floor was strewn with green rushes, very much as it had been strewn in the thirteenth century. A great carved mantel-piece, of curious workmanship, occupied almost entirely one side of the square. The other was filled by a huge old bed hung with the same tapestry as the walls. Two carved chairs stood by the hearth, and in the embrasure of one of the windows was set a heavy, ancient cabinet, carved with panels illustrating the life of Saint Dominic, upon the top of which stood a beautiful silver crucifix.

"That is to keep away the devils of Hérista," the Dauphin said, seeing Chrysander's eyes fixed upon it. "I believe it is considered fine, and M. de Curé is always begging it for the Church, but I do not care to part with it, for it was blessed and given to my house by Saint Dominic himself, so my father used to say, and it seems a

little discourteous to part with the good saint's gift, and might offend him—who can tell?" He spoke quite gravely, and regarded the silver crucifix with respectful admiration. "He was a good friend to all my house," he said simply, referring to Saint Dominic, "and he was certainly a very great saint. I have an affection for that crucifix, since it was his, and I should be sorry not to see it there when I wake in the morning. The sun always strikes on it and makes it shine."

"And does it keep away the devils of Hérista?" Chrysander asked, with a smile.

"I suppose it does, for I have never seen any up here; nor have I seen the ghost of the wicked Dauphine who murdered her husband in this room, and is supposed to haunt it."

"I should not like to sleep in a room where a murder had been committed."

"No? I never thought much about it," the Dauphin said, in his calm way. "Old Marthe will not come near this room at night, but I have never seen anything. The wicked Dauphine could not do me any harm. Here is the staircase by which she escaped after the murder," he added, pushing aside the tapestry and opening a little door in the wall, beside the bed. "The stairs are rather broken, but I use them sometimes, when I have been fishing late and do not want to wake old Marthe to let me in."

Chrysander peered down into the gloom of

the staircase, pierced here and there by the narrow line of light falling from a lancet window. The air which came up to him seemed cold and damp, and he drew back quickly.

"Is it not dangerous to leave it open like that?" he said. "Any one might come up."

The Dauphin laughed.

"There is no one to come up," he said, "except, perhaps, the devils of Hérista. And, I suppose, a staircase more or less does not matter very much to a devil if he wants to come. And now, M. Chrysander, we must go back to the villa, or Madame Vaillot's cooking will be spoilt."

XII

THE days wore on, and Chrysander neither saw nor heard anything more of Conca. She seemed to have disappeared from the scene of the Villa Mimosa. Once he asked Monsieur Vaillot where she was. M. Vaillot leaned upon his spade, looked reflectively into space, and remarked that he believed she had gone to stay with his mother at Coquelaure. For some reason Chrysander did not feel altogether satisfied with this explanation, and proceeded to make inquiries of Madame Vaillot, who replied without an instant's hesitation that she had sent her niece in to Saint-Raphaël to nurse a cousin who was ill.

Chrysander felt that there was some mystery, and applied in desperation to the Dauphin d'Hérista, who replied curtly that he knew nothing whatever about the girl.

Chrysander asked no more questions.

He contented himself with the society of the Dauphin, and with the next act of his opera; with the sunshine of the terrace, and the shade of the feathery mimosa-trees. He made friends with the three sleek grey cats of the villa, and with Love, a nondescript kind of hunting-dog with an English name. Last, but not least, he made the acquaintance of the old curé, Father Pasquiou.

The curé lived in a little whitewashed cottage behind the villa, where flowers bloomed always, in the beds which were the pride of the old man's heart, and a canary-bird fluttered its golden wings, and poured out its golden voice from a little cage hung just above the curé's study-window. The place was like a doll's house, ridiculously tiny, and ridiculously neat, thanks to the energy of the priest's ancient housekeeper. The red-tiled floors shone like glass, and not so much as a spider's web was allowed to profane the immaculate walls. One felt that the canary-bird must certainly be taken down and dusted every morning, and that only the dignity of his office defended the curé from a like process. He himself, in his shabby old *soutane* which was beginning to turn green at the seams, and with his

white hair falling in picturesque disorder about his bent head and kindly old face, was the only untidy object in the spruce little *presbytère*.

He was adored in Hérista. Dogs and children seemed to spring up from the earth wherever he went, sure of a pat from his gentle old hand, and a pleasant word from his gentle lips, which had never spoken ill of any human creature. He was, as the Dauphin had said, the very soul of charity. As often as not the modest meal which old Jeanne prepared for him was sent straight from his table—much to her disgust—to one of his parishioners who was more in want of it than he considered himself to be. It is possible that he was often imposed upon, often cheated and deceived; but his humanity was proof against all disillusion and he never found it out. He was the least business-like person imaginable, an Arcadian of Arcadians, a miracle of benevolent simplicity; but perhaps Hérista, if it imposed upon him, loved him all the more for his unworldliness. Even the Italians at the quarry, who looked like the most murderous of brigands in their broad hats and red sashes, and had a reputation for being all anarchists and socialists of the hottest description, which caused them to be looked upon with respectful awe in Hérista—even they had not a bad word for Father Pasquiou.

He had a passion for music, and played old-world, simple melodies upon his violin, with a

real grace and feeling which excused many technical errors. Chrysander won his heart forever by asking his violin over to the villa, and playing his accompaniments. M. le Curé was almost breathless, with a delight which was not a little touching. That the great M. Chrysander should condescend to play with him——! It was an honour which flushed his simple old face with colour, and made the violin tremble in his wrinkled hands.

It was upon the occasion of one of these practices that Chrysander heard something more of Conca. He was sitting at the piano with his back to the window, and M. le Curé was tuning his violin behind him. Suddenly the broad sound of the open strings ceased, and Chrysander heard an exclamation.

“So Conca is home again!” Father Pasquiou said in a tone of some astonishment. “I thought she had gone as *bonne* to a family at Nice.”

Chrysander said nothing. It was evident that Conca’s movements had been differently explained to many people besides himself.

“Poor child!” Father Pasquiou went on, wiping the neck of his violin with his handkerchief. “She is such a strange little creature, with such a strange voice. You have heard it, of course, M. Chrysander? Ah, I have often opened my window at twelve o’clock at night to listen to her, singing on the rocks. It is the

most wonderful sound I have ever heard—it is like nothing earthly. But I am afraid she is a difficult child to manage, and does not get on with Madame Vaillot very well.”

“Madame Vaillot does not seem very fond of her, I think,” Chrysander remarked.

“She is devoted to her, M. Chrysander. Madame Vaillot is a curious person, with odd manners, but she has a heart of gold—a heart of gold,” the old man repeated thoughtfully, screwing his G string up a little and holding the instrument close to his ear, the better to hear the sound. “Yes, she is devoted to Conca, just as she was to Conca’s poor mother. Ah, poor Thérèse, how fond we all were of her!”

He spoke sadly, and laid the violin on the table. Chrysander saw that he was inclined to talk and swung half round on the music stool.

“This Thérèse—Madame Vaillot’s sister—she is dead?”

“Yes, indeed, monsieur—dead many years ago, poor girl. Well, well, I am an old man and I have known many sorrows, but I do not think I ever grieved over any one as I did over poor Thérèse. And never to know where she had been—never to know what had happened to her during those five years—and then to see her come back to die. Ah, it was a sad story that, if you like.”

“Tell me,” Chrysander said gently.

“There is so little to tell, monsieur. Thé-

rèse was the prettiest girl in Hérستا, and there was not a creature in the place who would have done her a harm. She was so gentle, and quiet, too—always content to sit by the sea and work, never cared for sightseeing or gadding about, but as simple and sweet a little thing as you could meet. And she was betrothed to the grandson of my old Jeanne, and they had fixed the wedding-day, when, without a word to any human creature, she disappeared—vanished as though into air. No one had seen her go, and we hunted from St. Raphaël to Cannes, but not a sign of her could we find. Madame Vaillot, who was just married then, nearly died of grief for her sister's loss, and has never been the same woman since; and poor Sibylle Moro took to the *absinthe* and is little better than a madman now."

"But the girl came back?"

"Five years afterward, monsieur—yes. I remember it well—the mistral was blowing that night and my old Jeanne had shut the doors early, for I had a bad cold in the head and could not go out. I was reading in my little study, and all at once Jeanne burst into the room, without so much as a knock, and came and caught hold of the side of my chair as though she could not stand. And all she was able to say was 'Thérèse is here—Thérèse is here!'"

He paused as though recalling the excitement of the moment.

"So I ran out into the kitchen and found the poor child, and she fell down at my feet and burst into tears, and implored me not to send her away, and to be kind to her little girl, her poor little Thérèse. And we took her in and did all we could for her, but she only lived a few days."

"But where had she been?" Chrysander asked.

"Ah, that was what she would never tell us. She would say nothing of where she had been, and she would not tell us who had taken her away—she would not say who was the father of her child. It was all mystery—all darkness—and then she died. And Madame Vaillot took the child."

"But was not the child old enough to tell you where it had come from?"

"I do not know whether it was old enough, monsieur—it was four years old certainly—but it seemed to remember nothing, to understand nothing that we said to it. For a long time it did not speak at all except in an odd, mumbling sort of way that seemed like talking to itself. I think it did not understand French at all—that is the reason why I could never quite believe what Sibylle Moro said."

He broke off suddenly in apparent confusion, and looked concernedly at Chrysander.

"What did Sibylle Moro say, M. le Curé?"

"My dear M. Chrysander, my tongue runs away with me sometimes—it does indeed. I am

a foolish old man, and I ought not to have said that," the old priest cried, in great distress.

"But you need not tell me any more," Chrysander said quickly. "Pray do not trouble yourself, M. le Curé. I ought not to have asked you the question, for it was no business of mine."

"No—I would rather tell you," Father Pasquiou answered, recovering his usual calm. "It is better to tell you all, as I have told you so much. And of course no one believes it except Sibylle Moro, and he is an *absintheur*, and mad. It is absolutely absurd, absolutely impossible, and I never believed it for one second, nor will you believe it when I tell you. Sibylle Moro says that M. le Dauphin carried off poor Thérèse, and kept her all those years shut up in the Château d'Hérista!"

XIII

CHRYSANDER stared for a moment at the old priest. Then he burst into an involuntary laugh.

"But it is absurd—impossible!" he said.

Father Pasquiou nodded thoughtfully.

"It is absurd—yes. Did I not say so? But it is not impossible. It might very well happen if—if Sarrasin were not what he is. Of course he would not do such a thing."

"You are not quite sure that he would not; M. le Curé," Chrysander said suddenly.

Father Pasquiou looked honestly shocked.

"My dear monsieur, I hope I have not said anything that would lead you to suppose I would accuse M. le Dauphin of such an act?"

Chrysander watched him in silence for a moment.

"You have not said anything," he answered at last, "but in your own mind you are not quite sure that he did not do it. Pray do not be distressed—a man can not help his own thoughts. You try not to believe it, but you are not sure."

The old man shook his head sorrowfully.

"No—it is true. I am not sure," he said, "and I hate and despise myself, monsieur, because I am not. What has poor Sarrasin ever done to me that I should even admit a possibility of the thing? Oh, I hate myself when I think about it! But, you see, it is all so strange—and where could Thérèse have been all these years? The only place where no one looked for her was the Château d'Hérista, and therefore it is not impossible that she might have been there. . . . But then again, if she had been there the child would have understood French, and it certainly did not when Thérèse brought it here. You see, I do not know what to think."

"It is very strange, all of it."

"Yes—and another thing, monsieur. When Thérèse came back, she wore the very clothes in

which she was last seen before she went away; and they were no more worn than if she had only been away a day. Is not that extraordinary too?"

"Yes."

"And Sarrasin is a very strange man, monsieur. He never tells one anything, but I am sure he was in love with Thérèse at one time—yes, I am quite sure of that. They played together as children, and he was always on the rocks with her."

"And did he seem distressed when she went away?"

"For a week, none of us saw him, after she went, monsieur. But I did not observe any change in him, except that I think he became more silent than before. And he tried very hard to save Sibylle Moro, but Sibylle would not be saved, poor fellow. To this day he declares that M. le Dauphin ran off with Thérèse—no one will ever persuade him that it was not so."

"But the Dauphin could never have kept her in the castle for five years without any one finding it out!"

"Oh, that would not be difficult. No one ever goes near the château—it is supposed to be haunted. And old Marthe is as secret as the grave, in anything that concerns the d'Hérista. Yes, it could easily be done. The question is, was it?"

"It was not," Chrysander said suddenly. "I

will not believe it, M. le Curé. I have not known M. d'Hérista for many days, but I am quite sure that he did not carry off this poor girl, for, if he had done so, he would never have sent her away to die, and left her child to the charity of her relatives. No, I am sure he would never have done such a thing—you may put that out of your mind at once."

The old priest was engaged in brushing some dust from the sleeve of his worn *soutane*. He looked up as Chrysander ceased, and smiled his pathetic, kindly smile.

"Ah, my dear monsieur, it does my heart good to hear you say that," he answered cordially. "It is what I have always wished so terribly to believe—you do not know how I have wished to believe it, for I was always fond of Sarrasin, and he had never been anything but good to me. It hurt me to think he could have done such a thing. You are so certain that you make me certain, too. I think I will really put it out of my mind, as you say. No—Sarrasin could never have done it—you are right; it was impossible."

He repeated the words with a growing air of conviction, and Chrysander smiled. There was something at once comic and touching in the spectacle of this old man trying to overcome the doubts of so many years, at the word of a mere stranger like himself.

"Yes, it is impossible," he said again. "But

it is all very strange, monsieur, you must admit, and it is not surprising that I should have suspected—but I hope I shall never allow myself to be so uncharitable again. All the same, one naturally wonders about it a little—that can not be helped, I suppose. And the child, little Thérèse—Conca—has always been a strange creature, too.”

“Why do you call her Conca, if her name is Thérèse?” Chrysander asked.

“Because it was the only name she would be called by, monsieur. When she was quite little, and began to understand what we said, of course we began to call her Thérèse. But she used to scream and cry, and point to herself and say ‘Conca—Conca’—over and over again, until we gave in. And now she does not care about it—she would rather be called Thérèse—but every one has grown so used to the other name, that she is Conca still. Heavens! I shall be late at the chapel if I stay another instant! Monsieur, I entreat you to excuse me at once—what can I have been thinking of, to stay so long?”

He ran off down the path, his broad hat in his hand, and the skirts of his black *soutane* flying behind, in ludicrous resemblance to the wings of an aged and dilapidated crow; and Chrysander put the violin which he had left behind carefully into its case. A light figure passed the long window, and paused to watch this operation—a

figure with a pale little face and amber-coloured hair fastened by an amber comb. Chrysander looked up and caught the grey scrutiny of those unfathomable eyes fixed upon him with an intensity which at once chilled and flattered him.

He shut the violin-case with a snap and went out into the garden.

XIV

CONCA was standing upon the terrace when he reached her, with a rose in her hand. She gave him a little smile as he approached—a shy, strange little smile—and it was clear she felt disposed to be gracious. He murmured something about the weather, and stood beside her in a curious, sudden confusion, which he never remembered having felt before in the presence of much more important people than the daughter of poor dead Thérèse. She, for her part, twirled the rose between her small fingers with perfect self-possession, and looked at him calmly, with wide upraised eyes, in which he could read nothing but a polite indifference. The warm light of the sunset which lay pink upon the sea cast a faint tinge of rose-colour upon her pale features, and a warmer glow upon her amber hair. Chrysander woke suddenly to the fact that she was wonderfully pretty, with a delicate aërial beauty which he had not noticed before.

She turned the rose to and fro, and watched

him quietly. Presently she spoke in her high, silvery voice with its lingering southern softness of accent.

"You are better, monsieur," she said, with a little half-caressing inflection on the words. "When you came you were so white, so white! I thought you must be a ghost." She laughed softly, and laid the rose against her cheek as she smiled at him. "Oh, you are better, I can see. And soon you will be playing again, will you not?—It is so beautiful, your music; it is like the music I hear in my dreams."

"Do you dream of music?" Chrysander said, with quick sympathy.

"It is what I dream of always," she answered, looking away from him with eyes that had grown grey and still. "And I hear it, too—there is always music in the woods, in the sea."

She began to move, and he walked slowly at her side in silence, in a sort of fascinated attention. This was a new Conca, whom he did not know; a creature of delicate fancies, whom he had not dreamed to find. He had imagined something a little sinister, and perhaps cruel; and his heart smote him. He had surely been mistaken. He glanced at her face as he walked beside her, and reproached himself for his injustice. The sight of that childlike profile outlined against the fading pink of the sky touched him to compunction.

"Yes—there is always music," she went on, speaking more to herself than to him. "The sea is always singing, and the pine-branches are like the strings of a great harp upon which the wind plays what it will. You can hear them in the night, when everything else is silent."

She paused with her grey eyes still fixed upon the sea. Chrysander came a little nearer to her, and looked at her with softened eyes.

"You hear these things, mademoiselle," he said gently, "because you are—you are——"

He hesitated over the words; and quite suddenly she turned upon him. Her face was hard and white, and her eyes were filled with a stormy light which was almost terrible.

"What am I, then?" she cried, in a low, harsh voice of extreme anger, and also, he thought, of fear. He drew back a step.

"A genius, I was going to say—a poet," he answered. "Why are you angry, mademoiselle?"

For a moment she stared at him suspiciously; then the tense features relaxed, the brilliant eyes veiled themselves in grey shadow. She gave a little laugh, low and musical as the tinkle of water running swiftly over the stones.

"Forgive me, monsieur," she said. "What must you think of me? I thought you meant to say—something else. I am sorry."

She turned and went on, and Chrysander, after a moment's indecision, followed her

through the wicket gate which opened upon the path under the pine-trees leading down to the shore.

"Forgive me," she said again, almost humbly, after a little silence. "Do not be angry with me if I sometimes say strange things. I am not like the others here, monsieur——"

She broke off. Chrysander felt vaguely touched. Was she alluding, unconsciously, to the story which the old priest had told him? Poor child!—he did not know what she meant, but he was profoundly sorry for her.

"They do not understand the things I see, and the music I hear," she went on. "They say I am wild, and idle, and mad. Am I? I do not know what it is, but it is torture to me to stay indoors when the moon is shining, when the little waves are laughing and singing, and calling me out there. It is like a voice crying and crying to me, and something here"—she touched her breast with the rose—"makes me go out to meet it. I can not stay away—and they say it is wrong to go—they say that properly brought up girls do not roam about the rocks at night alone. Properly brought up girls!" She laughed, with a sound of odd, wistful contempt in her laughter. "Ah, monsieur, I am not a properly brought up girl! It would kill me not to go—that voice is like what the Phare over there is to the sea-birds—they must dash themselves against the wonderful light even though they

die. . . . And so I go, and the sea sings to me. . . . Is it wrong, do you think, monsieur? ”

She looked up with an air of appeal. A strange passion shone in her pale face.

“ No, it is not wrong,” Chrysander said decidedly.

Her deep eyes lighted with a smile. For an instant she seemed to hesitate. Then the light touch of her fingers brushed Chrysander’s hand, chill and ghostly as the caress of a spirit.

“ Ah, you will understand!” she murmured, below her breath. “ I thought that you would. You hear the music too—you make music like it—and you will understand.”

Chrysander was too astonished, too charmed to speak. The childlike confidence of her tone, the touch of her delicate fingers on his own, mastered him as though by some spell which he could not break. He walked on mutely at her side under the fragrant pines, between the red stems of which shone the burnished indigo of the sea. Darkness was falling fast under the shadow of the dry pine-branches. A bat circled overhead, fluttering with a mysterious noiselessness through the air, which seemed undisturbed by his flight. The chapel bell began to ring for vespers, and the little jingling sound took on an unusual dignity and sweetness in the twilight silence. Presently it ceased, and they could only hear the light whisper of the wave on the shore, the far-off voices of some children at play.

"Let us go down to the rocks," Conca said, in her soft, clear voice.

Chrysander followed her obediently. They left the shade of the pines and began to clamber over rough sand strewn with shells, where the fishermen had cleared out the *débris* of their nets. The beach was covered with pearly fragments—the tiny spiral *coquillages*, the delicately tinted and scalloped homes, now tenantless, of the *coquilles Le Saint Jacques*. Even the shells of the quaint sea-urchins lay about, still covered with bristles of green and purple, from which the mysterious iridescence of life had fled forever.

Presently they came to the bare, red rocks, stretching along close to the sea. Conca moved over the rough surface with the lightness of a sea-bird skimming the waves. Two red arms of rock jutted out into the clear water, and beyond one of them again lay a little island of rock, separated by a foot or two of water from the land. Conca looked back over her shoulder with a smile on her face and a challenge in her eyes, and stepped across the tiny gulf, Chrysander following her.

She gave a little laugh and sat down on the rock so close to the water that the ripples touched her bare feet. The pale amber of her hair had been ruffled by the wind into a halo which hung radiantly above her graceful little head. She laughed again and stretched out an arm into the water, hanging down over the red

edge of the rock. Chrysander sat down and watched her with a smile, as he would have watched a child at play. It did not seem necessary to keep up any conversation. He appeared to have entered suddenly with her into that subtle sense of companionship which does away with the conventional uses of speech.

She rippled the water with her hand, a light touch that was almost like a caress, and beneath her breath she hummed the fragment of song, sweet and strange, and vaguely sad. Chrysander watched her, and forgot the fading light. The darkness which drifted down upon them did not hide her face, which shone with a luminous pallor in the gloom. Presently the silver of a young moon flooded the sea. Stars blossomed like flowers unfolding under her light. A fairy wind wandered with a song through the pines.

In the pale, growing light of the moon, the girl's dark figure seemed to float in air above the ruffled silver of the sea. Her wet fingers glittered as they touched the water. Her song grew louder and sweeter, and the white flame of the moon found an answer in her eyes.

Chrysander sat silent, spell-bound. The lap of the wave, the sound of Conca's voice, held him mute. Was there really some magic about the girl? Why could he not turn away from that delicate, unearthly little face, with its shining, unfathomable eyes? Was the child a witch, after all, as the people of Hérستا seemed to think?

A shadow glided round the point of rock—the shadow of an orange sail. Conca's voice ceased suddenly, and another took its place—the calm, deep voice of the Dauphin d'Hérista.

“You will catch cold, if you sit on the rocks at this time of night, M. Chrysander,” it said. “Get into the boat, and I will take you back to the villa.”

Chrysander rose to his feet. To his astonishment he felt curiously faint and giddy. The moonlit sea seemed waving up and down, like a ribbon which a girl flutters in her hand. The orange sail seemed to grow gigantic, like the wings of an enormous bird stretched right across the sky. He stood for a moment before he could recover himself sufficiently for speech.

When he looked round again, the boat had come close to him, and Sarrasin d'Hérista was holding it off from the rock with an oar. The Dauphin's keen gaze was fixed upon him, and there was a curious expression upon his face.

“Where is Conca?” Chrysander exclaimed.

The Dauphin shrugged his shoulders very slightly. He did not take the trouble to turn his eyes from Chrysander's face. The rocks lay silent and deserted under the moonlight.

Conca was gone.

“I do not know where she is,” Sarrasin d'Hérista replied briefly. “Get into the boat at once, M. Chrysander.”

There was a sudden sound of command in his voice which Chrysander had never heard before, and he obeyed.

XV

THE orange sail hung motionless as a shadow in the still air. The Dauphin began to use his oar after the fashion of the gondolier, working the light boat slowly across the shallow bay.

"You should not go out on the rocks after sunset," he said presently, with a suspicion of reproof in his tone.

"But it is not late—I have not been sitting on that point more than ten minutes at the most."

"You have been sitting on that point for fully an hour," d'Hérستا said quietly, "for I have been watching you. Do not go out there at sunset again, M. Chrysander—believe me when I say it is dangerous." He paused for an instant, looked straight at Chrysander with his keen, clear eyes, and added in his calmest tone: "The mosquitoes are very bad at that point."

"Mosquitoes! My dear d'Hérستا, do you suppose I am afraid of mosquitoes?"

Sarrasin waited for a moment before he replied. They glided out of the shelter of the high rocks, and a breath of cool air caught the sail and filled it. The Dauphin glanced at the sky, shipped his oar, and sat down in the bow.

"Perhaps you will understand me better, then," he replied, "if I say that the devils of Hérستا are very bad at that point, M. Chrysander."

"I do not understand you at all. I suppose you are joking."

"I never joke," the Dauphin answered, in the same unmoved tone. "I have no time—and no talent, either. But if you intend to roam the rocks at this hour, I should advise you very strongly to go back to Paris. Hérستا is not a night resort. The evening air is unhealthy. There are mosquitoes—and devils, as I say. There is a miasma. One catches malarial fever, and a great many other unpleasant diseases."

"You do not seem to catch them, at any rate," Chrysander said, half angry and half puzzled by the Dauphin's gravity.

"I? Oh, I am a naturally unfeeling person, and neither devils nor mosquitoes find me at all attractive. Besides, I am used to them—you are not. That is quite different."

"I should like very much to know what you mean."

"Would you? Yes, curiosity is a very natural failing in many people's characters," Sarrasin d'Hérستا replied rather drily. "I have no doubt you would like to know, but for the present, M. Chrysander, I am not disposed to tell you. Besides, you would not believe me if I did; and you would certainly laugh at me, if you

were polite enough to keep your disbelief to yourself. No, I will not tell you, at any rate for the present. But, pray do not go out on the rocks at night."

Chrysander was silent for a moment. When he spoke again the gravity of his tone matched that of the Dauphin's.

"Let us speak plainly," he said. "You tell me not to go out on the rocks at night, and you will not give me a reason for not going. To talk about mosquitoes and devils is—excuse the word—absurd. You do not mean either the one or the other. I am not a girl, who is afraid of damaging her complexion; and I am not a hysterical fool, who expects to see ghosts. I am not afraid of the mosquitoes, and I do not believe in the devils any more than you do."

"I beg your pardon," Sarrasin said quietly. "I told you the other day that I believed in devils—in Héristera—and I am not going back on my word."

"Let that pass—I am not talking about your beliefs, nor, for that matter, about my own, except so far as they influence your action. I repeat: you say I am not to go on the rocks, and at the same time you refuse to tell me why I must not go. Is that not a little unjust?"

"No. It may appear unjust to you, because you do not know my reasons for acting as I do. It is not really unjust in the least."

"Then, is it not absurd to expect me to obey you?"

Sarrasin smiled gravely at his companion's puzzled face.

"I do not command you," he said. "I merely offer you advice. If you refuse to take it, that is no concern of mine. I warn you that the consequences to yourself may be very serious, and that is all. Do not speak of obedience, my dear M. Chrysander, or I shall think that you are trying to quarrel with me, and I do not care for quarrelling with any one, much less with you."

His tone was so open and amiable that Chrysander could say no more.

"It would be an impossible piece of impertinence on my part to dream of quarrelling with you, even if I wished to do so," he said. "Do not let us speak of it any more. I have certainly no right to ask you questions, and you have every right to refuse to answer them, if you please. And, if you say that you do not wish me to go on the rocks at night, unnecessary as the precaution seems to me, I will not go."

The Dauphin looked at him for a moment without speaking. Then he held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said simply. "You have given me great pleasure, and taken a heavy load off my mind. I am sincerely obliged to you."

There was so much of honest approval in the grasp of his strong, brown fingers, that Chrysander was content, despite his unsatisfied curiosity.

XVI

"AND now, will you come for a night's fishing?" the Dauphin inquired.

"I should be delighted. But I thought the fish did not care for strangers?"

Sarrasin laughed quietly.

"Oh, when the stranger is introduced by an old friend like myself, it does not matter very much," he answered. "And besides, to-night——" he paused for a second. "Yes, I think you may come to-night."

The light wind had fallen, and the boat seemed hardly to move upon the glassy surface of the sea. They had reached the mouth of the tiny river which ran into the Rade between the villa and the precincts of the château, and the current of the stream carried them a little further from the land. The Dauphin lowered the sail as the boat slid into the still water beyond the river channel. Then he lighted his big torch, and fastened it in the bow where the light would fall upon the water. From some receptacle in the stern he produced an armful of short, stout fishing-spears, which he laid in order in the bottom of the boat. Having arranged these de-

tails, he looked round him and whistled. A black head suddenly appeared from the shadows, and a pair of glittering eyes peered so closely into Chrysander's face that he started, and Sarasin laughed.

"It is only Mouton, my dog," he said. "He generally sleeps until the business begins. Did he startle you? He has rather a Satanic reputation in Hérista."

The black poodle stepped gravely into the bow of the boat and sat down, fixing his bright eyes on his master's face. The Dauphin bent down and patted him on the head once or twice before he began work. Then the business of the night commenced.

Chrysander leaned over the side of the boat and watched. It was a strange, picturesque form of sport. The blazing pine-torch attracted the fish, and very soon the flicker of moving fins disturbed the placid water. The Dauphin, leaning over the side with a spear in his hand, waited until a fish showed clearly below. Then he flung his weapon with a swift, unerring turn of the wrist which hardly disturbed the balance of the rocking boat. The water fluttered in a little ripple of black and silver and generally Sarasin's aim was so true that the handle of the fish-spear remained floating exactly where it had fallen. This meant either that the stroke had been fatal, or that the fish was too badly hurt to attempt to escape. In either case, it was soon

swung into the boat, gleaming with mother-o'-pearl reflections in the torchlight.

Occasionally the handle of the fish-spear began to move away, dragged by the string which connected it with the loosened head. Then the black poodle—who watched the whole proceedings with eerie, unblinking eyes, and never attempted interference until he was wanted—sprang into the sea, and came back to the boat with the spear handle in his mouth, to be lifted in with the fish dangling at the end of the string. The only disadvantage consequent upon Mouton's services was, that they postponed further operations until the fish had recovered from the shock of his sudden appearance among them.

For a couple of hours the Dauphin fished steadily and silently, and Chrysander looked on. The moon had disappeared behind the clouds, and the sky was dark, except for the stars. The torch burned up more brightly in the gloom, and a broad stain of reddish light lay upon the water. Mouton sat high in the bow, dripping, and deeply interested. The Dauphin stood with his hand raised to strike.

Chrysander watched idly. The brilliant glare of the torch showed the figures of the man and the dog, both in attitudes of expectancy. Mouton held his head on one side, and the Dauphin's keen, dark face was bent a little as he waited for his prey. Suddenly the spear flashed through the air. There was a heavy splash in

the water, which was violently convulsed, as though by the struggle of some unusually large fish. Sarrasin stooped down to catch the fish-spear, but it was jerked out of his reach, and immediately began to move away at a good pace over the surface of the water. There was a second splash, and Mouton was in the sea, swimming with all his might after the fast receding handle of the spear.

The Dauphin smothered an exclamation which Chrysander could not catch, and stood for a second gazing after the dog, with a curious expression of anxiety upon his face.

"It is a large fish," Chrysander said. "Had we not better go after the dog?"

Sarrasin hesitated. Then he murmured an inarticulate reply and seized his oars. The boat leaped forward over the smooth water.

Mouton had got several yards' start and was still ahead, a black, moving mark, which showed distinctly in the broad pathway of light cast by the torch. The spear was beyond him, dancing like a cork on the waves, and moving rapidly forward. It was clear that this fish intended to fight for his life.

Chrysander could make out a white flash as the creature fled. It seemed to move heavily in the water like a thing badly hurt, but it kept up its speed. Only very gradually did the dog creep up, diminishing the space between them inch by inch. Chrysander leaned forward eager-

ly. He was beginning to be infected by the excitement of the chase.

"The dog has it!" he cried. "Stop, you will run him down—good heavens!"

The exclamation was not uttered without reason. Mouton, as he said, had succeeded in seizing the spear. The fish, feeling, no doubt, the restraining force of the cord, turned quickly. There was a flash, a scuffle, a short, strangled yelp from the dog. Something rose out of the water—something white and round, extraordinarily like a clenched human fist. Again the flash, again the yelp, and then it was gone. And Mouton, with a howl, turned over and lay floating on his side in the water.

"He is hurt—row—row, M. d'Hérista!" Chrysander cried quickly. He was intensely interested, and altogether astonished. What in the world was this thing which had struck at the dog with what seemed so like a hand?

One stroke of the oars sent the boat alongside the helpless Mouton. Chrysander leaned down and lifted the dog into the boat. He was limp, inert, motionless. His head rolled helplessly on Chrysander's arm.

"I believe the thing has killed him, poor beast!" Chrysander said.

But Mouton's condition was not so serious as that, though the blows had very near ended his fishing for ever. After a little while he lifted his head, and tried to sit up on the Dauphin's

knee. He was trembling violently, and he whined from time to time. It struck Chrysander that he was, in reality, more frightened than hurt.

"It was the sudden shock," he said, stroking poor Mouton's diminished head. "He did not expect his prey to turn on him. Really, that must have been a very remarkable kind of fish!"

All this time Sarrasin d'Hérasta had made no remark upon events. Now, he suddenly put Mouton down and took up his oars.

"I will row you over to the villa," he said. "Madame Vaillot will wonder where you are. There will be no more fishing to-night."

Chrysander fancied that his voice sounded as it had never done before. He spoke quickly—almost hurriedly—and his deep, calm tones were shaken from their usual quiet. In the smoky light of the torch a strange pallor seemed to rest upon his dark face.

XVII

THE more Chrysander reflected upon this extraordinary adventure, the less he could understand it. He admitted the fact quite frankly to himself. He could not understand what he had seen, and by no process of which his mind was capable could he explain it. Neither could he explain away the memory of what he had

seen, or persuade himself that the sight had been a delusion, brought about by some eccentricity in the machinery of his own brain. He had really seen what seemed to be a human hand rise from the water and strike Mouton. He had really heard the dog's yelp of pain. If the thing which had risen from the water was not a hand—which it could not be, of course—what was it? The question was unanswerable, and the only solution of the mystery which occurred to him was that haunting remark of Madame Vaillot, "a devil, which eats fish." Was it a devil which he had seen? In his perplexity he was almost ready to admit the existence of devils in Hérista. After all, he had good reason, for he had seen one, or a part of one. If the thing was not a devil which had struck at Mouton, he felt that he himself must be on the verge of insanity, and it was better to admit the existence of anything than to come to such a conclusion as that.

So he argued, in perfect sobriety of spirit. In Paris, he felt he would have laughed the whole thing to scorn. In Paris he would have taken refuge in scepticism, in irony; he would have told the story to all his friends amid shrieks of delight. It would have amused him to tell it as much as it amused others to hear, and he would not have believed in the supernatural element in it any more than they did. In Paris he would have laughed, and disbelieved the evidence of *his own eyes*, of his own senses, in order to con-

form to the comfortable conventional materialism of all great cities. But the fact remained that here he was not in Paris, but in Hérista. The conditions of life in Hérista were not the conditions of life in Paris. The atmosphere of each place was so entirely different that no comparison could be imagined between them. Chrysander felt very clearly that things might happen quite naturally in the Rade d'Hérista, which would be mere impossible absurdities in the Champs Elysées. His own good sense told him that he was living in a world remote from any he had ever known, and that he could not pass judgment upon it according to any narrow standards of possibility or impossibility which he had acknowledged hitherto.

One thing he certainly would have liked to know, and that was whether Sarrasin d'Hérista really believed in the devils of Hérista as he said he did. That Sarrasin had been very much disturbed by the adventure with Mouton he was quite sure. But it did not naturally follow that he was disturbed because of the supernatural aspect of the affair. There might have been other reasons for his consternation; but, at the same time, Chrysander admitted to himself that it was difficult to imagine what they were.

This incident made a strange impression upon him—an impression which was stronger and more lasting in its effect than he quite cared to admit, even to *himself*. With the curiosity

which he felt was mingled a kind of fear of which he was heartily ashamed. It seemed like the old horror of his first night at Hérista, and it pursued him everywhere, even in his sleep. He had wild dreams, always of some mysterious creature in the water swimming just beyond his reach, and holding up a threatening human hand as though to warn him. The blue surface of the bay seemed a glittering trap, which held strange secrets and terrible enchantments. The very sight of it reminded him of that eventful night's fishing, and he at last turned away from it and avoided it, as though it had been something sinister and evil, which could do him harm.

It was a night or two after the adventure, and he had been working hard all the afternoon. Madame Vaillot, in the room behind him, was clearing away the dinner, and the rattle of china made a sharp little clatter in the stillness. Chrysander felt tired and restless. He had grown suddenly weary of the terrace, and the mimosa-trees which had turned to grey ghosts in the twilight, and bent over his chair with a strange flickering whisper of silken leaves. He wandered away from the villa, away from the shore, and up under the scented pine-trees of the forest, by the little path that ran beside the stream. The air was still and damp with evening, and a fine mist seemed to hover over the tiny river-bed where the thick, white plumes of the reeds showed in spectral ranks in the gloom. A frog

croaked dismally far away in the marsh, and an occasional belated cicada whirled across the path, like a minute shuttlecock of sapphire, or rose-coloured flame tossed from the battledore of an invisible fairy queen. The aromatic herbs which Chrysander crushed at every step sent out gusts of sweetness into the heavy air. Now and then a fish leaped in the black water beneath the trees, or a grey and red bombilius fluttered past, disturbed by the sound of a footstep.

Chrysander walked slowly. The dog, Love, who had followed him from the villa, appeared now and then from the underwood, snuffing, and wagging a contented tail, and then vanished again. He was in search of a rat, or a rabbit, Chrysander reflected, and he would have liked to send him back, for the rabbits were the property of Sarrasin d'Hérista. But Love was not to be dismissed, and after all he would probably catch nothing.

It had grown dark, and Chrysander began to think he must turn back. He sat down to rest for a few moments, and called Love to him. The dog came and lay down at his feet obediently, but with pricked ears which betrayed his own private desires. His thoughts were still clearly intent on rabbiting.

Suddenly Love half started up with a low growl. Chrysander caught him by the collar and held him down, rather astonished to find that his whole body was quivering with excite-

ment. The forest was silent, and nothing seemed to move. Presently there was a faint sound of footsteps which approached the place where they were.

A moment passed and then Conca came quietly down the darkening path. Her slight black figure hardly showed against the gloom of the trees, but her pale face seemed to make a moving light as she walked. A cold and almost spectral glimmer showed her fair hair. Across her shoulder she carried a string of bright objects.

She came nearer. Chrysander was not sure whether she saw him or not. The bright objects slung across her shoulder were fish, newly caught, and shining with the silver of water.

She was so close to him that he could see her eyes, lifted with a speculative expression very characteristic of her. They were grey and still, and all the light seemed to have gone out of them.

There was something almost ghostly in this silent, black figure, and Chrysander suddenly pronounced her name. She heard it, and turned her head quietly. Her eyes fell upon him with no sort of surprise, and he felt sure that she had been conscious of his presence all the time.

"Is it you, monsieur?" she said, in her cold musical tones. "I thought you had not finished dinner. Are you not afraid to be out so late?"

There was—or seemed to be—the very faint-

est touch of irony in her words, an irony so delicate that it pricked rather than stung.

Chrysander smiled and rose to his feet, still holding the dog by the collar.

"No, I am not afraid, mademoiselle. It is a warm night."

"Oh, I was not speaking of the night. It is warm enough, if it comes to that. I was speaking of the devils of Hérista."

"Why should I be afraid of the devils of Hérista?"

"I do not know, monsieur, but most people are afraid of them. It is nonsense, of course, and you are too wise to believe such things, even when you hear them from M. le Dauphin."

"How do you know I hear them from M. le Dauphin?" Chrysander asked curiously.

"I? I do not know. But no doubt he speaks of the devils of Hérista to you, since you seem to know about them. I do not suppose my aunt talks of them to you, or even M. le Curé. Is that Love? He ought not to have come with you. He knows he is not allowed in the forest."

She bent down as she spoke, and touched the dog's dark head lightly with her fingers. It was impossible to say whether the action was intended as a caress or a reproof, but Chrysander was astonished to feel Love crouch down at his feet, trembling and whining.

"He is afraid of you," he exclaimed.

She laughed, but he felt that she was annoyed.

"All animals are afraid of me, monsieur—did you not know that? It is the same with the cats—they spit, and swear, if I touch them. I think sometimes that I must be a terrible person."

"But that is very strange," Chrysander said. He remembered that odd sensation which he had felt when he turned and saw her for the first time, standing, wet with the rain, on the terrace.

"Is it? Well, I suppose that there are people in the world who make animals afraid of them, just as there are people who are afraid of animals—of cats, for instance. I know a girl who screams if a cat comes into her room. She always knows that it is there, even if she can not see it. Is not that strange too, monsieur?"

"Yes, but it is not uncommon. I never heard before of a person of whom all animals were afraid."

She laughed again, and walked slowly at his side along the narrow path. The darkness had deepened while they talked, and he could barely see her face. He began to be conscious of a faint uneasiness, of a strange physical discomfort which he could not analyze or explain. The cool air breathed pleasantly in his face, the whisper of running water made a soft, perpetual music in his ears. Yet there was upon him an ever-increasing sense of something which he could

not define, yet which filled him with a vague dismay.

The whisper of the water was growing intolerable, the silence seemed charged with some sinister meaning, when Conca abruptly stood still and turned upon him.

"It is the same with every one," she said, with a passionate bitterness in her voice. "You are all alike—M. le Curé, M. le Dauphin, my aunt, the cats, and Love, yes—and you—you. What have I done to you, monsieur, that you too should be afraid of me?"

Chrysander was startled out of his discomfort. The girl's tone was so earnest, so almost tragic, that all his sympathy went out to her.

"My dear child, I am not afraid of you," he said quickly.

"Ah, but you are!" she answered, with a strange little break in her tone. "It is the same with you as it is with every one—just the same. And I thought it would be different—I thought that you, who made beautiful music of your own, would understand, and not be afraid as the others are. Oh, I do not know why it is, but it is so—you may say what you please, but it really is so. They are afraid of me, though I have never done anything to hurt them. They are afraid, they do not love me, they tremble when I touch them. You saw how Love crouched down and whined? Well, that is how you all feel about me—you are afraid of me, every one of you.

What have I done—that is what I want to know—what have I done?”

The cry was so real, so utterly sincere, that it went to Chrysander's heart. Conca had turned away from him with the last words; her head was bent in an attitude which suggested tears. With a sudden impulse of pity he went up to her and took her hands.

“Indeed, indeed, you are mistaken,” he said. “I am not afraid of you, Conca—why should I be afraid? You have never done anything to hurt me. No—do not take your hands away—see, I am not afraid as you say, or I could not hold them. Now, will you believe that it is all nonsense, that there is nothing at all in this extraordinary idea of yours? You are quite wrong when you suppose I am afraid of you, or do not like you. Ever since I heard you sing I have wanted to be friends with you. Promise me that you will never think of this again—it is a horrible thought for a girl like you, and it hurts me to know that you imagine such things.”

He broke off breathlessly, carried away by his own words and the pity in his own heart. The idea that this girl, with her youth, and her beauty, and her marvellous voice, should imagine herself as a thing cut off and accursed by some curious quality which aroused fear and dislike, was really horrible to him, as he said. It was all the more horrible because, at the back of his *mind*, he felt that there was some foundation for

her statement—had not even Sarrasin d'Hérista told him that no one would marry her because she was reputed to have the evil eye?

She heard him passively, in a kind of incredulous silence. He felt that she only half-believed what he said. Presently she looked up at him with her wide, clear gaze, in which he read a still and wistful sadness.

"Thank you, monsieur," she said softly. "You are very good to me."

"But you must believe me."

She drew her hands away with a sigh.

"I will try to believe you if you wish. I believe that you really think what you say, and that is a good deal."

They went back silently toward the villa. Conca did not speak until they reached the terrace. Then she paused, and in the darkness he heard her voice, soft and musical, with a sound which was new to him.

"You are very good to me," she whispered; "but—but you are afraid of me, all the same."

He turned quickly toward her and peered into the empty dusk. She was gone: and in the mysterious darkness of the starless night he seemed to catch the echo of a laugh—or a sob—he could not tell which.

XVIII

CHRYSANDER had seen nothing of Sarrasin d'Hérista since the night of their fishing expedition, and it occurred to him to walk round the bay to the château and visit the Dauphin once more within his own walls. He started early across the sandy stretch of beach, where the silver sea-grasses rattled against each other with a hard, sharp sound. A little gulf of sand, and sea-grass, and pale desolation lay in the central cleft of the bay, studded with feathery tamarisk bushes, and intersected with little winding water-courses which cut mimic ravines through the sandy banks which overhung them. Further in, a few wretched houses stood mouldering in the sun, their yellow plaster walls cracked and broken, their doorways infested with miserable children and yelping dogs. Chrysander's way took him past this melancholy little settlement. Then he emerged once more upon the sand, the desolation, the pale grasses moving shudderingly to a dying air. The sand seemed to grow deeper as he proceeded, the grasses to reach higher, until he found himself straying in a miniature wilderness, grey and pale under the scorching sun. Here and there a small twisted tree held out its dead boughs over the hot sand.

Suddenly Chrysander almost stumbled upon a hut of reeds, half-hidden by silver grass and piled-up sand. For a moment he imagined it

must be the hut of one of the *douaniers*, or perhaps of one of the forest keepers. Then he caught sight of the figure of a man, seated in a huddled-up attitude in the pointed opening which served as a doorway.

The figure arrested his attention as though by some horrible power of fascination. Its attitude, the rags which covered it, the desolation of the scene which enframed it, made up a picture so strange and tragic that he stood dumb before it, staring.

Presently the figure moved a little and looked up. Chrysander saw a face neither old nor young and stamped with a kind of impassivity impossible to describe, impossible to forget. The man might have been thirty, or a hundred—every sign of distinctive age or youth had disappeared. Only in the eyes lifted to Chrysander shone an odd gleam of intelligence, wild, fitful, half-obsured and strangely disconcerting—a hint of sense, perhaps of cunning, at once pathetic and terrible.

Chrysander would have moved away, but the man glared up at him with his wild eyes and began to speak, at first to himself, in a mumbling, incoherent voice, and then more slowly and distinctly.

“Well—well—so there’s a new visitor to the home of the devil,” Chrysander heard him say. “The black Dauphin has a friend—oh, the smooth tongue never wants one in this world;

no, nor in the next either. . . . They're gay in the château . . . wine, and good meat, and music . . . oh, they're very gay! And my little Thérèse wears fine clothes, and diamonds that blaze like stars—the black devil's jewels, that his father, Satan, gave him long ago. . . . I see them, though they don't think it——”

He broke off with a horrible, cackling chuckle of laughter. His bent figure swayed to and fro to the gusts of his merriment. His face seemed convulsed by a dreadful parody of mirth.

“ Yes, yes, go on, monsieur,” he said, gasping and choking with laughter. “ Don't let me stop you—make haste to the château, the beautiful grand château, where my little Thérèse sits, so gay and happy, and forgets Sibylle Moro. Go on, and give them all my humble compliments: and say that, some day, when I have nothing else to do, I am going to pay them a little visit—a very little visit, but a happy one—oh, yes, *mon Dieu*, a happy one! There will be music then, if you like—the music I have longed for these twenty years and more. There will be wine—good red wine—yes, yes, wine so red you would say it was blood. And we shall all be happy for ever and ever, except that black devil of a Dauphin who will go down to his father . . . Why do you wait, monsieur? Will you not go on, as I ask you, and give my little message to your friend? ”

Chrysander turned hastily away, and walked on quickly, pursued by the rambling patter of the man's wild speech. Once he looked back over his shoulder. The crouching figure was still huddled up in the doorway of the reed hut. A ragged arm was pointed after him in the direction of the château, with a gesture which seemed to speak of menace. He caught the sound of Sarrasin d'Hérista's name, which reached his ears in a tangle of insane merriment and equally insane curses.

He thought of the tall, blue figure of the Dauphin, and a strange chill struck at his heart.

XIX

A FEW days after that apparition of Sibylle Moro, there came a visitor to the villa—an elderly, rather stout man, with a round face and little black eyes which twinkled incessantly. He was received very heartily by the Vaillots. Madame Vaillot's hospitality even went the length of putting on her Sunday dress and her best brooch. Her unusual splendour aroused Chrysander's interest.

"You have a friend to-day, madame?"

"Yes, m'sieu'. It is my husband's cousin from Fréjus. He has a *café* there. He is very well to do—it is a good business. He is to marry Conca."

"To marry Conca!"

"Yes, m'sieu'," Madame Vaillot answered, in her most impassive tone. "It is a very good marriage," she added with a touch of pride. "The *café* is one of the best known in Fréjus. You have finished, m'sieu'?"

"Yes—no," Chrysander pushed his plate away abstractedly. "And your niece—she is ready to marry this man?"

Madame Vaillot's straight black eyebrows rose in an expression of mild surprise.

"Conca? Oh, she is ready enough. It has nothing to do with her."

This seemed such a singular view to take of the case, that Chrysander almost laughed in the midst of his astonishment. He finished his lunch in silence and went out upon the terrace.

It was empty. So was the garden. He realised these facts with a touch of impatience. Conca was, presumably, in the kitchen, entertaining this *café*-keeper from Fréjus. The idea displeased him oddly—he could not have told why.

Presently he wandered down under the pines to the shore. That, too, looked strangely deserted. Far away, on the dazzling blue of the sea, the orange sail of the Dauphin's boat shone like a drifting flame.

Chrysander walked slowly along the rocks. At last he came to one of those deep clefts where the bright water runs in between ragged arms of rock, rough, and pointed, and bristling like huge

pieces of red coral. A white figure was stretched on one of the low ledges nearest to the water. It was Conca.

Chrysander went quickly over the rocks to her side. She did not move, but apparently she recognised his step, for she lifted a warning finger as he approached.

"Do not make a noise, monsieur, or you will drive them away. Look!"

He obeyed, and bent over her shoulder. One of her hands swung limply in the clear water, and round it a whole crowd of tiny transparent creatures had collected, hanging, as though magnetised, to every finger. After a moment or two she made a quick movement and they darted away in every direction.

"Are you catching shrimps, then?" Chrysander asked, amused.

"They are like little *langoustes*," she said, laughing. "They have tiny claws, and they can bite. No, I am not catching them to-day. You see, I have my best dress on, monsieur. Why do people ever have best dresses? They are a great nuisance."

She swung her wet fingers to and fro in the sunshine to dry them, and looked up in his face with the smile of a mischievous child. She made a pretty picture as she sat there, with the red rock behind her and the blue water at her feet. The white dress she wore set off the amber of her hair, and a faint colour showed in her pale face.

Chrysander found a seat, and looked at her.

"And why are you not in the villa, mademoiselle, entertaining your visitor?"

"I shall have quite enough of entertaining him when I am married to him," she said lightly. "I am not going to sit indoors on a fine day to amuse him now, monsieur—no, indeed! Besides, he has garlic sausage, and bouillabaisse, and a bottle of my uncle's best wine," she added, with a shrug of her shoulders and an account of infinite contempt. "What should he want of me?"

Chrysander laughed.

"And do you think a man visits his *fiancée* to eat garlic sausage and bouillabaisse, and drink *vin ordinaire*, while she sits in the sun by herself a quarter of a mile away?"

"I do not know, monsieur. It is a very comfortable arrangement, it seems to me. If I was there now, what could I do?"

"Well, you might talk, for instance."

"Talk? Oh, yes, that would be very amusing. What should I talk about? The mistral last week, or the price of wine at Saint-Raphaël, or the mosquitoes?"

"And are those not very good things to talk about?"

"Do you think so, monsieur?"

"Why should I not think so? Do you not talk to me about the mistral sometimes? And the mosquitoes are painfully interesting just now."

Conca settled herself comfortably on the rock.

"Fréjus is the place for mosquitoes," she said in a thoughtful tone. "They are not like insects there, they are like wild beasts. They eat you alive. Do you know Fréjus, monsieur?"

"I have been there once or twice."

"It is the most detestable place on earth—all marshes, and vines, and mosquitoes, and bad smells—oh!" Conca drew a long breath of disgust. "It is only bearable when you see it from the shore, going to Saint-Raphaël, with the mountains behind it. It is a pretty shore too, though there are no rocks; only sand. But there are beautiful shells with purple centres, that look like amethysts when they are wet. And there is a little round hole in almost every one of them, so that one can string them into a necklet quite easily. But, for Fréjus, I detest it!"

"What will you do when you are married, then?" Chrysander asked curiously.

"I do not know, monsieur. I shall be very unhappy, I suppose. Is it not horrible that they will not have me as I am? I do not want to be married—I am quite content here on the rocks."

"Poor child!" Chrysander murmured involuntarily.

She looked up at him.

"Is it not cruel, monsieur—why do they want to tie me to that man? Do you know,

sometimes I wake up in the night and think of it, and I think before they do that to me, I will go down and throw myself into the sea, and float away, far away, like the sea-weed does."

"My dear child, do not talk like that! You would be drowned."

She smiled her odd, mysterious smile.

"I do not think I should. But it would be better than marrying Jean Méral, and going to Fréjus. It seems to me terrible, this thing you call marriage."

"It is not always terrible, Conca."

"Were you ever married, monsieur?"

"I? No."

"Then what do you know about it? It is terrible, I tell you!" she went on passionately. "To be tied to some one and never to be able to get away—ah, it would kill me! If I marry Jean Méral, I know what it will be. For a little while I shall be miserable, and then some day there will be a quarrel, and he will be angry, that man; and if there happens to be a knife about I shall take it up, and then——" she made a quick movement with her hand as though stabbing the air——
"*Bon soir, M. Jean Méral!*"

She ended with a quick little laugh, as she sank back against the rock.

Chrysander was a good deal scandalised.

"You should not say such things, Conca, or even think of them. Do you know that you are talking about committing a great crime?"

"Is it a crime to set yourself free?" she answered indifferently. "Even a fish bites if you take it in your hand, monsieur."

"I dare say M. Méral is a very good man, and will be very kind to you, and very fond of you." Chrysander paused, assuming the rôle of monitor very much against his own sympathies. "And you will be just as happy at Fréjus as you are here, when once you get used to it."

"Get used to it!" Conca laughed shrilly. "Do you think I shall ever get used to *that*, monsieur? Jean Méral—and Fréjus——"

Chrysander was silent. Evidently this little fisher-girl was not an easy person to convince.

"Well, then, if you hate the man so," he said at last, "why do you not refuse to marry him?"

"Refuse? Who am I to refuse to do what I am told to do?" she answered sadly. "My uncle would beat me, monsieur, and I should have to marry Jean Méral just the same."

This reasoning was so correct that Chrysander could say nothing. He sat and looked regretfully at the white figure at his feet. It was a thousand pities, he told himself, but what could he do? What could any one do?

Conca rose and smoothed out the white folds of her dress.

"I am going into the forest, monsieur, because they are sure to look for me here and I do not want them to find me. Do not say you have seen me, if they ask. *Au revoir!*"

He watched her climb the rocks and disappear under the pines. For a long time he sat silent and motionless on the rocks where she had left him. It was no business of his, but at the moment he did not feel amiably disposed toward the excellent *café*-keeper of Fréjus.

XX

THAT evening, as Chrysander sat smoking on the terrace after dinner, a step sounded on the path, and Sarrasin d'Hérista came slowly up out of the gloom of the garden.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he inquired abruptly, as he dropped into a low chair. "I have not seen you for days. I would have come over to see you if you were ill, but there were fish in the Rade and I had no time for anything."

"I have been very well. I knew you were busy, so I did not come to the château. Will you have some coffee and a cigarette?"

"No coffee, thanks; I will have a cigarette, if there is one about." He helped himself from the case that Chrysander pushed across the small round table. "They are gay to-night, the Vaillots—eh?" he added, as he struck a light. "I have heard a strange voice just now."

"They have a cousin from Fréjus."

"Oh—Jean Méral? He must have a cold—I did not recognise his voice."

"Well, he is there," Chrysander said impatiently.

The light of the match fell redly upon the Dauphin's face, and Chrysander was almost certain that he smiled to himself.

"I am very glad to hear it. When is Conca to be married?"

"I do not know. And I am surprised to hear you speak of this marriage in that sort of way. The girl hates him."

This time Sarrasin smiled openly.

"Do not girls sometimes say more than they mean, my dear M. Chrysander?"

"How should I know?"

The Dauphin laughed.

"You write operas in which girls certainly do all manner of wonderful things," he said. "It seems to me that you should know something about them."

"Well, then, I do not. I never knew but one woman really intimately in my life, and I never pretend to understand even her," Chrysander said rather sadly.

Sarrasin d'Hérستا looked up at him through the light smoke of his cigarette. There was a gleam of sympathy in his eyes.

"You were wiser than I," he said quietly, "for I thought once that I understood a woman, and I was mistaken. There is nothing in the

world more dangerous than to be ignorant of one's own limitations."

"One seldom is," Chrysander answered. He was wondering what the Dauphin meant.

"On the contrary, one very often is, it seems to me. At any rate, I was—that is the point that concerns me. If other people do not make mistakes of that kind, I am glad."

He relapsed into silence, and Chrysander watched him curiously. Presently he reverted to the subject of Conca's marriage.

"She has been telling you about Jean Méral?"

"Yes. I really think some one ought to interfere."

"But why?"

"Because the girl ought not to be made to marry a man whom she detests."

"You have singular ideas," the Dauphin murmured, somewhat ironically.

"Why are they singular?"

"They seem singular to me. Jean Méral is a very good sort of man. He will give the girl a very nice home, and I do not suppose he will beat her more than once or twice a year, and that will quite probably do her more good than harm."

"Would you beat your wife, then, if you had one?" Chrysander asked savagely.

"I? Oh, that is quite different. The d'Héristas do not do that kind of thing."

"And is that child the sort of person to be beaten, and perhaps brutally ill-used?"

The Dauphin shrugged his shoulders.

"She is a peasant, after all," he said. "They are used to it, these women. What else can they expect? It seems to me that you have singular ideas, as I say."

"And it seems to me," Chrysander retorted, with some heat, "that you have still more singular ones."

Sarrasin d'Hérista did not reply. It was easy to hear the irritation of his companion's speech, but he was a man who took offence slowly. He sat silent, watching the smoke of his cigarette rise into the quiet air and melt away. His grave eyes expressed no interest in Chrysander's displeasure, though in reality he was more interested than he cared to show. Perhaps, if the truth were told, a little contemptuous wonder was mingled with his interest. He did not understand the excitable, irritable temperament of a man whose nerves had been shattered by years of ill-health, and he was astonished that any one should lose his temper about a matter which did not concern him any more than Conca's marriage apparently concerned Chrysander.

"I am going to fish presently," he remarked at last, rising from his chair. "Do you care to come, M. Chrysander?"

"Thanks, not to-night. I have to write some letters."

The Dauphin's shoulders hinted a shrug as he nodded and said good-night. Chrysander watched his departure, for the first time since he had known him, with unfriendly eyes and a sense of relief.

"The man has no soul above his fish," he said to himself—with complete injustice. "He has the manner of a prince, and the mind of a peasant. I have been very much mistaken in him."

He sat on the terrace for a while longer; but the beauty of the night was spoilt for him, and at last he went in and, under the stress of irritation, penned a long epistle to Madame de Maillane—the only woman, as he had told the Dauphin d'Hérستا, whom he had ever known, or cared to know, intimately. He told himself that she, at least, would understand—that she, at least, would have the heart to pity this girl who was being sacrificed to the crass stupidity of other people. And under this impression he poured out the pitiful story of Conca's forced marriage at some length and with considerable emphasis.

But the results of this letter proved that he had been right when he told Sarrasin d'Hérستا that he did not pretend to understand even Madame de Maillane.

XXI

WHEN the answer to the letter arrived, he opened it with a pleasant sense of the sympathy that was so soon to soothe his anger and perplexity. This state of mind soon gave way to bewilderment, and presently to a feeling deeper and more unpleasant still.

Madame de Maillane wrote at length—in fact, at great length; but it appeared that she was not at all interested by his letter. She was enjoying herself immensely, and she had hardly time to write a line. She then—with entire and delightful inconsistency—favoured him with three pages minutely describing some festivities she had just honoured with her presence. Every one was delightful—everything was delightful. She never remembered such a charming entertainment—and so on—and so on.

At the end of the letter was a postscript, scribbled hastily across it.

“I am so amused at your letter. Are you setting up as a knight-errant, for the rescue of distressed damsels? My dear Paul, it is a dreadfully unsatisfactory profession, that, and not at all fashionable. But, if this child has such a voice, why do you not marry her yourself? She could make her *début* in your new opera, and it is really time you married some one.”

Chrysander put down the letter with sentiments which approached perilously near to dis-

gust. This was the reward of his devotion for so many years! . . . "It was time he married some one." . . . Was it possible that any woman could be so cruel? Or did she really suppose that it was only friendship he felt for her? But that was not possible. He nursed his anger with the axiom that every woman knows when a man cares for her. It was true that he had never betrayed himself, even by a word. But perhaps she despised his self-command. He had paid her the supreme homage of silence, of respect—and in return she told him it was time he married; it was time he carried his unwelcome passion elsewhere. She dismissed him with a smile and a jest. She suggested that he should marry the niece of one of her own servants—he, Paul Chrysander, who loved her!

For a long time he sat there staring at that heartless sheet of paper.

Then he did what he had never done to any letter she had ever written him—he tore it into a dozen strips, and threw it into the waste-paper basket at his feet.

She had given him his dismissal. Well, he would take it. A hint of that kind does not need to be given twice.

XXII

JEAN MÉRAL, for some reason which Chrysander could not guess, seemed suddenly to have developed an unusual affection for Conca's society. He began to come over from Fréjus almost every night, and Chrysander sat on the terrace and listened, with a growing sense of irritation, to the sound of voices and laughter in the kitchen of the villa. He felt vaguely that there was something in the air—some project connected with this marriage, the very idea of which filled him with disgust and indignation. Yet he was powerless—his part in the drama was to sit by and look on. It must be confessed that he performed it very badly.

His irritation was increased by the fact that he seemed abandoned to solitude and his own reflections. Sarrasin d'Hérista spent all his time fishing, and Conca was never to be found. Chrysander lost interest in his new opera, and sat on the terrace all day with a book on his knee, which he did not even pretend to read. Hérista had suddenly grown irretrievably dull, and he began to think of a return to Paris—but Madame de Maillane was in Paris. In his present state of mind a dragon could not have delayed his return more effectually.

So he lingered still under the mimosa-trees by the blue sea: and one evening, after a day of unpleasant solitude, he walked across to the

little whitewashed presbytery. The fragrance of flowers, wet with dew, hung about its shining walls as he opened the wicket gate. Old Jeanne came shuffling alone the red-tiled passage in her slippers. Yes, M. le Curé was at home. Would he come in?

She led him into the tiny sitting-room with its tiled floor and immaculate walls. Father Pasquiou sat huddled up in his big chair with a ponderous volume on his knees. His untasted supper stood on the table beside him. Old Jeanne sniffed indignantly behind Chrysander.

"It is always the way—never do I bring in anything that is eaten before it is cold," he heard her mutter to herself. Father Pasquiou looked up, and jumped actively out of his chair.

"My dear M. Chrysander, I am delighted to see you! What is that, Jeanne—did you say anything about supper? Well, bring it in and M. Chrysander will join me."

"I dined an hour ago," Chrysander said, laughing, "and I suspect your supper has been waiting for you longer than that. Now, unless you sit down and eat at once, M. le Curé, I will not stay."

Father Pasquiou, abashed by Jeanne's indignant glances, turned obediently to the neglected meal. Chrysander sat down and talked of the weather and the fishing, and examined the bare little room. The canary in his cage in the cor-

ner roused himself with a sleepy chirp, and began fluttering at the bars of his wicker prison.

"He wants his supper," Father Pasquiou explained, as he rose and opened the cage. "I let him out of an evening when the window is shut."

So the little bird came and walked about the table, and picked up crumbs as they talked; and Chrysander's irritation faded away, exercised by this atmosphere of peace.

"Have you heard the news?" Father Pasquiou said at last, when his supper was finished, and the canary, having satisfied his hunger, began to take small, gleaming flights about the room.

"No. Is there any?"

"But, yes—there is to be an event to-morrow."

"An event? Do they expect some fish in the Rade?"

Father Pasquiou laughed gently.

"Now, now, my dear monsieur, do you imagine we think of nothing but fish in Hérستا?" he said. "No, this has nothing to do with fish. A friend of yours is to be married."

Chrysander looked up quickly. The atmosphere of peace charmed him no longer. The soft intermittent chirp of the canary seemed to grate intolerably upon the silence.

"You mean Conca?"

"Yes—have they not told you? That is odd. But of course you will come and look on."

"No, I shall not," Chrysander answered quickly.

Father Pasquiou leaned back in his chair, with an expression of surprise on his mild old face.

"But that will be unkind," he said. "It will hurt Madame Vaillot's feelings. And she is a good woman—it would be a pity to do that."

"It does not seem to me that she is a particularly good woman to force this poor girl into a marriage she detests. At least, that is not my idea of goodness."

"But Conca did not detest the marriage when it was arranged—before you came."

Chrysander looked up and met the old priest's gaze hotly.

"I hope you do not insinuate, M. le Curé, that I have anything to do with her detestation of it?"

Father Pasquiou rubbed his hands together in visible perplexity of spirit.

"My dear monsieur, pray, pray do not be angry! I do not insinuate anything—on the contrary, I wish to speak quite frankly. I know you had not the least idea of doing any harm, but, but——"

"Well?" said Chrysander coldly, as he paused.

"But it was not wise to talk to the girl so much—what am I to say?—I do not know how *to put it*. You meant no harm, but Madame

Vaillot did not like it. She even came to me. I said that I was sure you did not mean the least harm in the world, but that did not seem to satisfy her. Then I told her that if she did not like Conca to be with you so much, the only thing to do was to send her away. She said that her relatives in Coquelaure could not have her just now. And then——”

He paused again, and looked timidly at Chrysander's angry face.

“And then?”

“Then I said, monsieur, that the only other thing to be done was to hasten on her marriage, and let her go away to Fréjus.”

There was silence. Chrysander sat very still, watching the flights of the canary with eyes that did not see them.

“I understand,” he said at last. “Well, monsieur, I suppose you have acted wisely, according to your lights. But it would have been simpler, and more honest, to tell me that Madame Vaillot objected to my acquaintance with her niece, though it might not have seemed very complimentary to me, for I never knew I was such a reprobate that I could not take an innocent interest in a young girl without giving rise to all kinds of scandalous suspicions——”

“Monsieur?”

“You do not put it in that way, but that is what you mean. I speak more plainly than you do, but I say exactly the same thing. You sus-

pected me. I do not like suspicion, and I will wish you good-evening."

"Monsieur!" poor Father Pasquiou repeated piteously.

"I do not blame you, M. le Curé; you do not know me of course, and I suppose no one is sufficiently angelic in this world to be taken on trust. But I do not like being suspected, as I say, and this particular suspicion is the kind I like least of all, because I deserve it least. I do not pretend to be a saint, Heaven knows, but I am not quite a scoundrel. I should have done that child less harm, I think, than you have done her by forcing her into this marriage."

"Do not be angry, I entreat you," Father Pasquiou cried earnestly. "On my honour, I never suspected you—you do me a great injustice to suppose such a thing ever entered my mind. I told Madame Vaillot it was absurd; how can I be responsible for the ridiculous ideas of these people? And the girl would have married Jean Méral sooner or later, in any case."

"I suppose so," Chrysander answered, with considerable bitterness. "But I would rather not have thought that she owed the loss of even a few months of her liberty to me. That is what you can not understand, I suppose. You say to yourself that the sacrifice of this girl is inevitable, and even rather convenient. She will have a good home! . . . Poor little wretch! She does not want a good home, she wants to be free, to

be left a little longer to her woods and her rocks, and not to be tied to this *café*-keeper whom she hates. I tell you, M. le Curé, that you have committed a wicked act in hastening this affair even by a day. The marriage is a crime, and you are responsible for it."

In the silence that followed this astonishing statement, Chrysander departed, leaving Father Pasquiou too thunder-stricken for speech. The little bare room returned again to its stillness, its solitude; but it was no more the hush of peace, the quiet of meditation. A subtle change was in the air, a nameless, yet perceptible difference.

Even the canary felt it, and ruffled his golden wings as he flew back into his cage.

XXIII

CHRYSANDER was too angry to feel the least compunction for the hard words which he had poured out upon Father Pasquiou. He was too angry even to reflect that, from the standpoint from which the old priest had looked at the matter, his advice had really not been so very unwise. The whole thing was intolerable, he told himself, and he would leave Hérستا at once and for ever. The place had become detestable to him, and he desired nothing so much as to leave it as soon as possible.

He went straight to his room when he

reached the villa. The shutters were closed to keep out the mosquitoes, which are always most numerous just at sunset. He flung them open and let a flood of moonlight into the room. The sight of the silver bay, asleep in the brilliant night, cooled him a little. He stood for a while looking at it before he left the window. When he turned away his anger had left him, leaving behind nothing but a sorrowful regret for this child who was worthy of a better fate.

He lay awake for a long time, haunted by this gentler sentiment. Conca's face rose before him, pale and wistful, with its unfathomable eyes. There was something written upon it which he had not noticed before—a shadowy fear; an appeal, perhaps—was it to him? The thought hurt him intolerably, and he tried to thrust it from him. At last, tired out, he fell asleep.

He could not have slept long, for when he woke the room was still white with moonlight. He woke with that strange sense of having been roused by a sudden call, which he had felt on the first night, when he had heard Conca sing. It was her voice that had wakened him then—it was her voice which he heard now. It came up from the rocks, sweet and clear, and cold as ice. A curious chill ran through him as he listened.

The air was white with moonlight, and the moonlight seemed to be part of this wonderful song which hovered in the air like a light. The *sound of the sea* whispered through it, like an

accompaniment of a few monotonous notes repeated again and again. And the voice was like a voice which calls, and will not be denied—like a spell which drew him toward it with a fascination which had in it nothing earthly. He was hardly conscious that he had actually risen and dressed, until he found himself standing on the terrace. Even then he was not conscious of any astonishment, such was the force of this magic which compelled him. It was not a woman he had come to find, but a voice—the voice of an angel or a bird, the supreme enchantment of a sound. .

He went along the terrace, and out under the thin tall trunks of the pines, and through the black shadows, down to the brightness of the shore. The rocks lay red and still under the silver moon. The sea glittered like a vast live thing breathing under myriad scales of burnished steel. And this sound of a drifting song led him onward without resistance, without any sense of conscious movement. He was the slave of a magic without mercy, a glamour that had no name.

And suddenly he found himself face to face with the singer of the song. She stood on the rocks, so close to the water that the ripples touched her bare feet. The light of the moon blazed full upon the pale radiance of her hair, which hung about her shoulders in wet folds, dripping with the silver of the sea. The glory

of light which surrounded her gave to her face an almost unearthly loveliness, a strange, spectral beauty that had in it something of the supernatural. And her voice—that clear, cold, wonderful music rose through the moonlight, with a magic which the ages have not known since Ulysses stood bound to the mast, and heard, alone among his warriors, the Sirens singing their song of death beside the undying sea.

Chrysander stood motionless, listening. She did not seem to see him at first. The song went on, and the pale, lifted face showed no sign of recognition. Was it her last song which she had come to sing—her last hymn to the liberty of the rocks, the shining freedom of the sea? Chrysander thought of the swan who sings before he dies. Her own words flashed across his mind: "I think I will go down and throw myself into the sea, and float away, far away, as the seaweed does."

Would she do it?

And if she did it, would it not be a better fate for her than this marriage with Jean Méral, the inn-keeper of Fréjus?

As he thought, she sang. The icy sweetness of her voice seemed almost to chill the soft air of night. It was a sound too exquisite for earth—so exquisite that to hear it was almost pain. Chrysander lost all sense of time or place. The sky and the sea vanished, the dark pines melted away. Nothing was left but the white figure

standing high on the rocks, and this enchanted voice hovering like a bird in the silver night.

Then, suddenly, there was a flash in the moonlight. The voice ceased.

Chrysander, brought rudely back to earth, looked round him with astonished eyes. Conca was gone. There lay the sea, twinkling in the moon; there lay the rocks, red and desolate, and the twisted pines. But the white figure had vanished—the wonderful voice was still.

He never knew how long he stood there, too astonished even to move. Then his eye caught the gleam of something bright in the blue water. It was vague, elusive, the very ghost of a moving brightness upon the water, but the sight of it restored his scattered senses. He knew that it was the gleam of Conca's hair, shining as she drifted out to sea.

It seemed to Chrysander afterward that some power outside himself drove him into action. He remembered the boat at the Villa Mimosa, which lay not so many yards away. It took him perhaps three minutes to reach it and unfasten the rope, which moored it to the little white landing-stage. A few seconds more, and the small brown sail was heeling over to the light night air as the tiny vessel rounded the red point of the rocks.

The gleam of Conca's hair was gone. Instead, something seemed to move through the water fifty yards ahead with a regular movement

as of a person swimming. Chrysander dared not call, lest she should suppose herself pursued and sink. He bent over the side breathlessly, guiding the boat on its way.

The boat was gaining upon her when she seemed for the first time to realise that she was being chased. He saw her lift herself in the water for an instant. Then she began to swim more quickly. The wind dropped a little, and the boat laboured heavily in the water. The swift flash of her arms flung a silver light on the air.

They drove on through the bright water, the boat which pursued and the girl who fled. The strangeness of his chase did not strike Chrysander. All his desire was to reach this thing which flashed before him, to rescue the voice which had bewitched him from the salt, choking sea. At that moment it was not of Conca that he thought—it was of the voice in the moonlight, which he might never hear again.

The dark, irregular coastline fled past them like a frightened snake. Already the moon was down, the stars hung pale in the sky. The water had grown dim and dirty, under the altered light. But the regular flash of Conca's arms showed only a few yards away.

The boat was gaining fast upon her. She was so near that Chrysander could hear the splash of her movement in the water. Then the shadow of the sail fell upon her, and the boat was at her

side. She looked up, and in the dim, cold light Chrysander saw her face. It was pale, terrible with the look of some hunted wild thing caught in a trap. With a hoarse cry she threw up her arms and sank.

Chrysander leaned out of the boat so far that the slight vessel bent almost level with the water. He caught at the only thing within his reach, the long fair hair which floated still upon the surface, with a last desperate effort, and drawing her alongside, he lifted the light figure of the sinking girl into the boat.

She dropped at his feet, and lay there sobbing, gasping for breath. The little boat righted itself and flew along under the freshening breeze.

For a long time Chrysander did not move. He sat as in a dream, looking at the figure which crouched at his feet. She sobbed still, violently, like a crying child. He did not try to comfort her.

Presently she looked up at him. Her pale, distorted face was piteous with entreaty.

“Monsieur, do not take me back!”

Chrysander looked at her silently.

“Do not take me back!” she sobbed.

Chrysander roused himself from his dream. The stars had gone, the water glowed with a pink light. In the curve of the land beside them the tall white cupola of the church at Saint Raphaël shone above the quay. Further in, the spire of Fréjus rose softly against the blue Mountains of

the Moors, and the broad sweep of sandy bay put on a pale flame of gold.

Behind them, the sudden southern day was breaking like a red rose that bursts in a moment into bloom.

Chrysander looked down at the girl in the bottom of the boat.

"I will never take you back!" he said.

XXIV

Two days later Sarrasin d'Hérista, seated on the terrace of his ruined castle, with his brown nets in a tangle across his knees, received a visit from the postman of the district, who presented him with a letter. Sarrasin had never had such a thing before in his life, and he could not suppress a little exclamation of surprise. The postman smiled a little, in a wholly respectful way, and lingered a moment in the broad sunshine.

"Your pardon, M'sieu' le Dauphin!"

Sarrasin looked up from the unopened envelope.

"Yes?"

"You have not been over to the villa lately, I think?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because there are strange doings there—my faith, yes!" the man said. "The gentleman *from Paris* is gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes—and taken more than himself with him, too. The Vaillots' Conca is gone also."

The Dauphin's face changed.

"Indeed?" he said coldly.

"Indeed, yes. Gone in the night, both of them. There's a queer thing for you! If it had been any one else now, one would not have wondered. But that little sea-witch, with her pale lips and her white hair—well, well, it's not my taste—no, I'd have flesh and blood while I was about it, not a bundle of cold sea-weed with a voice of the devil's own making. The girl has sea-water in her veins, that's certain."

Sarrasin did not answer. The man shrugged, touched his hat, and lounged away. A moment later he came back.

"Once more, pardon, M. le Dauphin."

Sarrasin's face was very still and stern.

"Yes?"

The man shuffled awkwardly from one foot to the other.

"Well, it's nothing, perhaps—but I met Sibylle Moro as I came along. He's in one of his mad fits—chattering of—what you know, m'sieu'. But there's one thing fresh in his madness. He swears she's here."

"Who?"

"Not the—the other, M. le Dauphin—Conca!"

"You must have mistaken what he said," Sarrasin answered quietly.

"No, m'sieu'. He said it more than once. He says Conca is here. He says he will come one fine day and find her. And—M. le Dauphin, you know he used to think you——"

"I know."

"Well, I think he confuses the other girl with this one. And I do not like what he says about you, m'sieu'."

"I am not afraid of him," the Dauphin answered rather sadly.

"You are afraid of too little, m'sieu'. That man hates you—and he is strong. Madmen are always strong. Do not go near him just now."

"I never see him. Do not distress yourself about me, Jean, I am safe enough."

Jean shrugged once more, touched his hat again, and went away muttering to himself. Sarrasin, left alone on the terrace, opened the letter.

It was from Chrysander, and it was very short. He had married Conca the day before at Marseilles. They were just on the point of starting for Paris. Would the Dauphin be kind enough to convey the information to M. and Mme. Vaillot, and accept his sincere apologies for not having said good-bye to him in person, as he had hoped to do?

Sarrasin sat in the sun for a long time, with *the letter* on his knee, and a curious expression

on his face. The letter was not like Chrysander. The action was not like Chrysander. It was underhanded, it savoured of premeditation, of intrigue—and that was not like Chrysander either.

Why had he done this thing? Did he really love this girl he had married? It was all what people—uninformed people, who did not know the actors in the drama—would call very romantic—the Dauphin knew that. And yet—was it romantic after all? A beautiful peasant girl, with a mysterious origin, a celebrated composer—an idyll on the shores of the Mediterranean—an unwelcome *fiancé*—and a runaway match.

Sarrasin smiled ironically. Oh, it was very romantic, of course. But——

He turned the letter meditatively between his strong fingers. Perhaps his view of the matter was necessarily a little unjust. He was disappointed in Chrysander. The Dauphin d'Hérista had never possessed many friends. He felt that he had just lost one, and that he could not afford it.

And at the door of his reed hut on the sandy shore of the Rade, the gaunt figure of Sibylle Moro crouched, chuckling with insane mirth.

"A new visitor to the house of the devil—oh, they're a gay party, a gay party. He could not leave even that—no. She must go, as my little Thérèse went before. . . . Perhaps they are the same—I don't know. Yes, I think they are the

same. My little Thérèse came back, and I never knew it until the Black Devil-Dauphin took her away again. Yes—that's it—that's it. I ought to have known, but I have grown stupid nowadays. I don't hear, I don't know, I don't see. But I see his face—curse it! I know his step, I hear his voice—always—the voice that I hate, the voice that lured her away from me. Oh, we will settle our little account one day, M'sieur le Dauphin—you shall pay me all that you owe me—yes, and more—more!"

He shook his ragged arm wildly in the direction of the château, and burst into the uncanny laughter which was so horrible to hear.

But there was no one to hear it just then except the sapphire sea and sky, and the wind that whispered like a creeping voice among the grey and silver reeds.

BOOK II

I

It was five years to a day since a man and a girl in an open boat scudding under a brown sail such as the fishers use, had seen the sun rise over the Gulf of Fréjus.

Again it was sunshine in the gulf. The Mountains of the Moors showed like grey clouds against the flushed sky. The cupola of Saint Raphaël shone above the sleeping roofs of the town like a single pearl. Away over the sand and marshland the pointed spire of Fréjus church stood out in a single line of silver against the grey beyond.

In the centre of the blue bay was anchored a large steam yacht flying the French flag. The white sides of the vessel were reflected for yards in the cool grey water, and even the three vivid stripes of colour in the flag—red, white, and blue—had an almost equally vivid counterfeit below. The air was still, yet fresh. A solitary seagull swept leisurely in huge, graceful curves over the polished surface of the water. In the distance

a single fishing-boat with an orange sail drifted out into the open sea.

On the deck of the white yacht a man stood leaning over the rail. His eyes were fixed on the grey panorama of the land, on the rising spires, the huddled roofs, the dark, mysterious shadows of the hills. He was bareheaded, and the rising light showed the grey in his hair, the lines in his thin face. It showed a thing stranger still, too, for the man's face was that of a young man, despite its lines, despite the grey hair above it.

There were people in the world who whispered that Paul Chrysander had aged terribly since that romantic marriage of his, which had been a ten days' wonder to his acquaintance, and a perpetual enigma to his friends.

As he stood now, gazing at the hills, he looked very worn and tired. Once he turned his head seaward, saw the orange sail, and sighed. Then he folded his arms on the railing and continued his contemplation of the shore.

The orange sail, the grey hills, the spires of Fréjus warming under the sunrise, brought back to him many of the events that had conspired to place him there at this moment, on the deck of the white steam yacht, looking at the shore. He thought of Hérستا, of the little Villa Mimosa which had been the shrine of his devotion to a woman who had not cared for him; he thought of the pine woods by the sea, and the red rocks, *and the white figure of Conca moving over them*

with a step light and free as the air. He thought of the great grey château with its pointed towers, overhanging the blue waters of the Rade. He seemed to see once more Sarrasin d'Hérista, fisher and prince, standing in the wide old hall of his ruined castle, as once he had seen him stand, with the tattered banners drooping over him under the dust of centuries, and the grave smile of welcome in his eyes.

All these things came back to him with the sunrise, with the gradual revelation of the unfolding shore. A shadow fell upon his face as he remembered—the shadow of a doubt, of an almost wistful wonder at the strange course of Fate. Here, five years ago, he had sat in the brown-sailed fishing-boat, with a girl weeping at his feet. Here he stood to-day, in the same place, looking at the same scene at which he had looked then. Yet the difference between that day and this was so immense that it seemed almost to change the eternal sameness of the hills and the sea.

The difference was not in them—he felt that clearly enough. But he was looking at them with changed eyes, so that they could not seem the same. He had often wondered, during those five years, whether the sight of those hills, and the red rocks of the Rade d'Hérista, would bring back to him, even for a moment, the Chrysander who had looked upon them once. Sometimes it had seemed to him that it might be so.

now, standing there, he knew that it was impossible.

Perhaps it was better as it was—he did not know. He had not been particularly happy in the days which now seemed so bright to him. He thought of Madame de Maillane with a strange little stab of recollection, of pain. For a moment her face, clear and radiant, stood out before him, a living, breathing presence against the ghostly background of sea, and shore, and sky. He had never seen her since his marriage. He heard from her occasionally, still—graceful, kindly, half-careless little notes such as one indifferent, yet polite, acquaintance may send to another. He answered in the same strain. It seemed to him that he had become indifferent even to her, as he was indifferent to many other things which had once meant so much to him. He told himself that he should probably never see her again, and was conscious of no regret. She also had become to him a mere name which meant nothing, a memory, a shadow, unsubstantial as air.

He knew that her husband had died a few months after his own marriage. She had not married again, though it could not be from any affection for the memory of a man who had never spent more of his time in her society than he could decently avoid doing. She devoted herself to her little son, a delicate boy, who needed a good deal of care. She spent most of her time

in the country—the summer on her husband's estate in Normandy, the winter in Nice or at Hérista. This was why the Chrysanders, who lived in Paris, had never come across her. Once or twice Chrysander wondered whether she avoided him purposely, but dismissed the idea almost as soon as it occurred to him.

No, there was nothing deliberate in her indifference—she had not cared to keep up their friendship, that was all. She had tired of it, perhaps, as people often tire of a friendship that has lost the novelty which is its only real charm. She had gone her own way, glad to lose the burden of his company in her life. She had dismissed him—with no unkindly intention, perhaps—he recognised that possibility now as he had not done before. But she had wanted him no longer, and so she had bidden him make for himself interests of his own, which would enable her to be free.

Well, he had done it. He had accepted the situation and made the best of it. He had married a girl to whom marriage with him seemed to offer the only chance of happiness—almost of salvation. He had devoted himself to her with all his energies. He had taken up her life and tried honestly to make it happy and successful. It had been both, as far as she understood the terms, and he told himself that he was content. He did not care to consider what his own had been.

II

A LIGHT touch brushed his shoulder. He returned, to find Conca beside him.

Even here the difference between the present and the past was dazingly defined. This was not the little fisher-girl of five years ago, this radiant creature in pale green draperies that fluttered softly to the growing freshness of the air. She had laid her hand on his arm, and he saw the sheen of the pearls that almost covered her fingers.

"Good-morning, Paul," she said, in her cool, clear tones. "Are you sentimentalising over the sunrise? I was awake, and I thought I would come out and see the bay." She leaned beside him for an instant, looking at the grey lines of the hills with eyes as unfathomable as of old. Presently she laughed softly—the laugh that had always an odd sound of mingled pathos and irony. "So we are here for the anniversary—of all places!" she said. "Do you remember, Paul? Pray make me a pretty speech—it will go so nicely with the view."

Chrysander looked at her for a moment. He did not make a pretty speech, but he drew a little velvet case from his pocket and held it out to her. She took it eagerly—almost greedily.

"More pearls, Paul? Thank you so much!" She opened the case and stood looking at its contents with absorbed interest and admira-

tion. Presently her eyes were lifted to meet Chrysander's gaze. They were soft, and misty as the light that filled the bay.

"Thank you, Paul," she said again, quite simply, and with a different accent. She held up her face and kissed him as a child might have done. He sighed quickly, watching her with a curious wistfulness on his tired face.

"They are what you wanted?"

"I always want them," she said, with a laugh. "I should die without pearls, I think." She held the white string of gems in the light, and saw the pink flush of the sunrise mirrored on each milky jewel as though through a delicate, pale mist. "And there are women who actually wear diamonds!" she said, with an infinite contempt in her tone.

Chrysander laughed.

"You can not expect every one to share your taste. And diamonds are hardly more expensive. One can spend quite a decent fortune on these innocent little white things, you know."

She was looking at them with soft eyes, and touching them lightly with her fingers.

"What does the cost matter?" she said carelessly. "It is the things themselves that I care for—I would not give a single pearl for the price of every string I possess. But of course you do not understand."

"No," Chrysander said quietly. It was quite true. He did not understand his wife's passion

for pearls—any more, for that matter, than he understood his wife herself.

Perhaps she was conscious of the fact, for she suddenly put her hand through his arm and laughed.

"Of course not—what do you understand about me? And now you have known me for five years you understand me less than ever."

"I am sorry, dear."

"You need not be. It is a good thing—for you. You will not get tired of me, you know. And as for me—well, I do not think I want to be understood. It is a passion with some people, I believe—that. They are always yearning for some one to understand them. It always seems to me very silly, and a little vulgar. It is like wanting to take a perfect stranger into your soul and show it him as a kind of spectacle. No—I never want to be understood."

"You have your want, if that is any satisfaction to you," Chrysander answered, with a shade of bitterness.

"I have most of my wants—or rather, I have no wants at all—thanks to you," she added, in a graceful afterthought. "You make it difficult even for a woman to entertain a single unsatisfied desire, my dear Paul, and that is paying you a higher compliment than you know."

Chrysander was silent. She dropped into a long chair and sat looking for a while at the shore. In the pale, flushing light she had an

air half-spectral, half-fantastic, in her loose green draperies that trailed upon the white deck. The pearls on her hands and at her throat gave out a veiled radiance as she moved.

"It is very beautiful," she said presently, with a different sound in her voice. "There is nothing so beautiful as the sea—nothing so mysterious, and lovely, and cruel. I can not imagine any one wanting anything more in life than this. To sit and look at it, never to be away from it, never to lose sight of it. What could one want besides?"

"Pearls," Chrysander said, smiling.

She waved her hand lightly at the water.

"If you have the sea, you have them. Does not Heine say that? 'The sea hath its pearls,'" she murmured half to herself.

Chrysander caught the words.

"You are one of them."

A shadow crossed her face—light and undefinable as the shadow of a mist on the sea.

"Why not? At least, I cost as much as most pearls," she answered with forced gaiety.

He was silent. She leaned an elbow on her knee, and sat bending forward a little, her eyes devouring the pale greys and rose-colours of the dawn.

"Yes—it is very beautiful," she said again. "I had forgotten what it was. And for five years I have been shut up within four walls in Paris while all this has been going on—for five

years! What a waste of time! Paul, you will never get me back into a house again."

"That will be rather inconvenient."

"Why should it be? I can live on the yacht. I can never go back again, now I see how beautiful it is. Oh, I will never go back!" she repeated, with her soft laugh. "Look at the pink light on the sea, and the violet on the hills. What can you give me in Paris to make up for that?"

"I? I can give you nothing," Chrysander said sadly.

It was true. He recognised it—not for the first time, but with a greater completeness, perhaps, than he had ever done before. He knew that he could give her nothing—that she wanted nothing that he could give. Did she want anything on earth, this strange, brilliant creature, with her sweet, cold voice, and the unreadable riddle in her eyes?

"You can give me this—that is quite enough. I suppose you will run in to Hérستا, Paul?"

"I had not thought of stopping there," Chrysander answered, somewhat evasively.

"Oh, but you must. I want to see it again. We will go to the villa and surprise my aunt."

"I shall certainly not go on shore," Chrysander said quickly.

She gave him a glance of amused comprehension.

"Why? Do you suppose Madame la Duch-

esse is in residence? She might be, it is true, but that is no reason for stopping away. Should you not like to see her again, Paul?"

"No."

"That is odd. I should have thought——"

She broke off, and sat with a thoughtful little smile on her face.

"What should you have thought—and why should you have thought it?" her husband inquired rather drily.

"I should have thought," she pursued, "that if one had once cared for a person, as you did for Madame de Maillane——"

"And how do you know that I cared for her?"

She laughed.

"How do I know? Well, certainly not from personal experience, my dear Paul—I admit that. I was never in love with any one for five minutes in all my life—not even with you. Do not look hurt. It is only the truth, you know, and you are fond of truth, I believe. I do not know how I came to find out exactly that you cared for her, but I did."

Chrysander did not answer. She gave him another half-malicious little glance.

"And I will tell you something else, that you do not know yourself," she said after a moment's silence.

"What is that?"

"You care for her still."

"You have no right to say that."

"Oh—none at all. You are a model of all the virtues, I quite admit that. But you care for her—you have always cared for her. Confess now, Paul," she added, laughing, "that you were thinking of her just before I came out."

Chrysander looked up quickly. She smiled, and gave her shoulders a faint shrug under their green draperies.

"There—I was right, you see. Oh, I am not jealous. You care for me more than for her—in a different way. But I think," she said slowly, "that you care for her in a way that you will never care for me."

"My dearest Conca——"

"Do not interrupt me. I am not jealous, as I say. It is such a different kind of way that jealousy is out of the question. Your love for her is a sentiment; your love for me is an infatuation."

"Is it not a little unkind to tell me so?"

"Unkind! I do not know—it is the truth. And you do not deny it."

"No, I do not deny it," Chrysander said sadly.

"Then why do you call it unkind? There is one thing I should like to know, though."

"What is that?"

"Which is the stronger of the two, the sentiment or the infatuation? It would be interesting to know."

"Infatuation is stronger than sentiment."

"Is it? I am not so sure," she said almost wistfully. There was a sudden melancholy in her strange eyes. "I am not so sure," she repeated, in a lower tone.

Silence fell upon them—the silence of growing light, of waters whispering an almost inaudible song. Presently she spoke again.

"It is odd, but I can never seem to get that—the other way," she said, meditatively. "You would jump overboard if I told you to, Paul, but you do not care for me like that, all the same. I think really that, at the bottom of all your love for me—and there is a good deal of it, of its kind, I will do you the justice to say that—there is also a sort of hate. Does it seem odd to say so? Perhaps that is not precisely what I mean, but words are not subtle enough to explain it. I am not sure that I could explain it if they were. You hate me a little, and you love me a great deal. Some day you will hate me a great deal, and not love me at all."

He made a movement of protest, of denial. She waved her jewelled fingers at him and went on:

"Yes, yes—I know, I know. But it is true for all that. You love me, but you hate me too. In your own mind you are afraid of me. I am a riddle, a perpetual query, a thing of infinite incomprehensibility—and no man can quite love a perpetual query, not even a genius like you.

He may think he does, but that is a poetical delusion. My dear Paul, there is a great capacity for self-delusion in your character."

"Thank you! And now, if you have finished analysing our respective characters, and have settled to your own satisfaction that you are a riddle and that I detest you, we might go down and have some coffee."

She burst into a ripple of musical amusement.

"How delicious, Paul! Have I made you really angry? There—do not be absurd. It is all nonsense, I dare say. I am the most charming affirmative in the world, and you adore me—and let us go down and have coffee, as you suggest."

III

AN hour or two later the white yacht was steaming slowly eastward along the red and blue bays with their dark fringes of pine-wood. The broad southern sunshine lay like a smile upon the sea. A riband of silver foam trailed in the wake of the yacht, and the seabird from the Gulf of Fréjus pursued it with graceful, gleaming flight. On deck, under a green and white awning, Conca lay in her long chair, watching that familiar shore as it glided past. The mood of the morning was gone. She was pale, silent. There was a shadow in her eyes—the shadow of a vague unrest.

Chrysander left his music below once or twice to look at the red-rock bays, and the slight figure lying silent under the cool, greenish light reflected upward from the sea.

"What is the matter, Conca?" he said once.

She shook out her green draperies, with a laugh and a sigh.

"I do not know. It is like opening an old book in which some one has dried a rose. There is the scent of the rose, and the shape of the rose—and yet the rose is not there, only a yellow, crushed mockery of itself. I seem as if I am trying to find something among all these things I know so well. Perhaps it is myself—myself as I was then. Shall I ever find it, Paul?"

He watched her curiously for a moment.

"Do you want to find it?"

"Yes—you do not know how much I want it," she said eagerly—almost passionately. "After these five years of exile, of artificiality, I want it more than anything else in the world. Oh, for five years I have been living the life of a prisoner, though I never knew it. But now I know well enough. Yes—I want it terribly—to be the child I used to be, to run about barefooted on the rocks, to swim in the cool, dark sea."

Chrysander looked at her in silence for a little while. Then he went below and left her there, with an odd foreboding which he could not explain.

IV

PRESENTLY, in his cabin below, he heard a sound which made him lay down his pen on the sheet of music-paper and listen, with a curious, intent look upon his face.

Some one was singing on deck—very softly, very slowly, like a song in a dream.

He listened. The sound grew louder, clearer, stronger. It was the song which Conca had never sung since that last night in Hérستا, when he had found her singing it, with the blue waters rippling over her feet, and the light of the moon on her face.

A strange little chill struck through him as he listened. It seemed to him as though the mystery of those days and nights under the pine-trees rose from its five years' old grave, and laid an icy touch upon his heart.

V

THE white yacht glided on over the quiet sea. The little bays flew by, the hills crowned with purpling heath and starry flowers of the arbutus. They passed the next bay to Hérستا, where the Italians from the quarry, wheeling barrows full of stones into the long cross-sailed boat moored beside the rude pier, paused in their labour to watch the fairy-like vessel go by.

The yacht rounded the last point.

Before them lay the Rade d'Hérista, shining in the sun. The little white villa peeped from among its pines and roses; the great château, guarding the opposite side, slept secure upon its terrace of sandstone. A boat with an orange sail rocked peacefully in the middle of the bay.

Conca sat silent in her chair. Chrysander leaned over the rail and looked at the shore.

Suddenly he glanced round at her quickly. Then he turned his attention once more to the Villa Mimosa. Her eyes followed his glance.

On the terrace she could see, distinct in the morning sun, the tall figure of a woman in a pale summer dress. A little boy in a white suit was beside her, pointing excitedly at the yacht.

She looked straight at the yacht—at the man leaning over the side.

Conca rose, with her light, soft laugh, and touched her husband's arm.

"I do not think I shall find what I spoke of again—even in Hérista," she said. "Come, Paul—I am going on shore."

VI

It was Madame de Maillane who stood on the terrace of the Villa Mimosa. Her little boy had run for a glass and was peering through it at the yacht.

"E-s-t-e-r-e-l," he spelt out with childish deliberation. "That is Esterel. Look, maman, they are lowering a boat."

"Do not dance about like that, dear Bob," she said, putting a repressive hand on his shoulder. "They will suppose you are a little savage, who has never seen a yacht before. Give me the glass, and stand still. Yes—it certainly is the Esterel."

She gave him back the glass with something like a sigh, and yet there was a certain interest, not to say curiosity, in her tone. She knew that the Esterel was Chrysander's yacht, just as she knew many other things about him during those five years in which they had never met. She could not have told how she came to know them. People told her anything they happened to hear about him, as one who would be interested. She never seemed particularly interested—she certainly never encouraged any one to gossip about the man who had been her friend. But she heard, and what she heard she remembered. It was, perhaps, her sincerest tribute to friendship which had ended—in something else.

For she did not blind herself, in those five years, to the fact that she had once come very near to loving Paul Chrysander—so near that she had behaved cruelly and unjustly to him, as it was not in her real nature to behave to any living thing. She had been so near to loving

him, indeed, that she had stooped to a sudden violent, illogical jealousy of a girl she had never seen—a girl who had lived in her own house as a servant, and in whom he had taken, possibly, just such a passing interest as he might in fifty others. Possibly—she did not know, because she had always a melancholy conviction that it was her own hand which had fanned the flame of an innocent interest into something much more disastrous and far-reaching in its effects. She never forgot that it was she who told Chrysander to marry Conca—and she never forgave herself for doing so, though she had long forgiven him for following her advice.

For there had been growing up in her mind for years a conviction that this marriage was not a success. It was built on nothing definite—on a word here, a hint there; but it was a very strong conviction, all the same. She too, like Sarrasin d'Hérista, distrusted the romance of that runaway match, which a commonplace world had found so picturesque. To her it had an air, less of romance than of desperation: and the worst part of all was the knowledge that she had driven him to it.

Through all those years the question in her mind had been, why had he done this thing? If he really loved the girl, she felt that she could forgive herself. If he did not—if he had turned to marriage either as a makeshift or a vengeance—she felt that she had committed at least one

action in her life for which there was neither pardon nor excuse.

And now, quite suddenly, there was coming an answer to her question, and she would know.

The boat from the yacht touched the little landing-stage against which the orange sail of Sarrasin d'Hérista had flapped so many times during Chrysander's sojourn at the Villa Mimosa. A light figure sprang out. It was a woman: and she was alone.

The Duchesse de Maillane moved forward across the sunlit terrace, holding her son by the hand.

Her answer had come.

VII

WHAT Madame de Maillane met at the end of the terrace was a vision in a pale green dress, with pearls at her throat, a face almost ghost-like in its pallor and in the delicate cutting of its beautiful features, and a pair of the strangest eyes she had ever yet encountered in her passage through the world. With the generosity of a woman who has no need of any petty depreciation of another's beauty she decided that the owner of the eyes was beautiful. There was no doubt in her mind on that point. Her next emotion was a wild, instinctive rush of pity for *Chrysander*.

Conca stood face to face with her for a minute, looking at her with her cool, inscrutable glance, at once insolent and mysterious. Then a smile curved her lips and she held out her hand.

"You are Madame de Maillane," she said. "I believe I am trespassing on your landing-place, but you must forgive me. We ought to know each other, but, unluckily, we have never met. My husband is an old friend of yours, and you have possibly heard of me. I am Conca Chrysander."

"So I supposed," Madame de Maillane said quietly.

It would have been polite to say that she was glad to see her visitor, but she omitted the courtesy. She barely touched Conca's slim, cool fingers with her own. If she could have avoided that she would have done so. Love at first sight may be an uncommon passion now-a-days; hatred at first sight is still by no means rare. At that moment Clothilde de Maillane, who had never hated any mortal thing in her life, hated that woman in the green dress standing smiling before her on the terrace.

Perhaps Conca divined as much. There was certainly an edge to her smile as she continued:

"I am delighted to meet you, madame, but my visit to you is only a happy accident, for I did not know you were here. I came to see my aunt, Madame Vaillot. My husband did not

want to come into the Rade, but it is five years since I have seen her, and as we were so near I made him come. Of course he did not imagine you were here," she added lightly.

"You must be anxious to see your aunt," Clothilde de Maillane said.

Conca laughed.

"Terribly anxious. If you will excuse me, madame, I will go and find her. She is probably in the kitchen. *Au revoir!*"

She gave an airy, fluttering salute with two fingers, and passed on, leaving the Duchesse de Maillane, for the first time in her life, absolutely bewildered. But her fine instinct saved her. A moment later she was at Conca's side once more.

"My dear Madame Chrysander, you must not escape like this. I have wished to meet you for five years, and now I am certainly not going to let you run away. You must come to breakfast with me—you and M. Chrysander, if he will spare the time to come and see an old friend, whom he has neglected shamefully."

She laughed, with a vain effort to put herself at ease with a woman whose strange eyes filled her with a sort of fear.

Conca stood silent for a moment, regarding her with a gaze half-amused and half-ironical.

"You must not expect too much of a genius, madame, and Paul is a genius," she said. "He has all the eccentricities proper to his kind. But *I dare say* he will come if you wish it. He has

a great regard for you—he was telling me about it only this morning.”

She passed on lightly, smiling, and vanished from the terrace into the villa.

Madame de Maillane stood looking after her with a blank expression on her beautiful face. She was recalled to the things of this world by little Bob, who was tugging at her skirts.

“What is she?” he asked, in an awestricken whisper. “Why did she look at you like that? I do not like her at all, and—oh, maman, is she *real*?”

VIII

AN hour later the Duchesse de Maillane, seated at her pretty breakfast-table on the terrace, was trying vainly to answer Bob’s question.

Was she real, this radiant creature who sat opposite to her, chattering in her soft, high voice of everything—or nothing? Was she flesh and blood at all, or only some brilliant mockery of both?

She could not tell. Neither could she tell the meaning of the shadow which lay upon Chrysander’s face—her old friend, from whom a strange constraint and silence seemed to separate her. Five years ago she would not have sat in awkward wonder as to what to say to him next. What had happened to her—or to him?

She would have been very much astonished if she had guessed.

Chrysander sat silent in his place, making a pretence of eating his breakfast. He did not know that it was Madame Vaillot's finest *bouillabaisse* which filled his plate—it might have been cooked seaweed for all he cared.

It seemed to him a dream, this breakfast under the mimosa-trees on the terrace. There was at his heart a vague contentment, a strange, reckless abandonment to the enjoyment of the moment. But behind the content, behind the enjoyment, lurked a terrible fear, which he would not confess to himself—then.

The broad, golden sunshine baked the gravel of the terrace, the grey mimosa-trees whispered overhead. A cicala sang monotonously near at hand, a blue kingfisher shot across the azure bay. Little Bob sat at the head of the table, doing the honours with a queer, old-fashioned childish dignity—a quaint little figure in a white cotton suit, with a great country straw hat on his fair head. His mother sat on his left hand, grave and silent, in her simple muslin dress and the soft fichu which gave her an air of belonging to a past century. She too wore a country hat looped up over her face into a picturesque Napoleonic shape.

Chrysander looked at her now and then with his sad eyes. When he looked she answered him *with the old, gracious, kindly smile* he knew so

well. Her voice had a softer sound when she spoke to him, just as it had when she spoke to little Bob. Her great brown eyes were shadowed with a pity which he divined by instinct, and for which he felt pathetically grateful. He did not ask why she pitied him—he was content, for the moment, to take the sentiment on trust, as it were, and without explanation. It was enough for him to bask in the warm consciousness of her presence. He felt like a man who, after living in a chilly vault for years, is suddenly brought out into the glory and heat of the sun. His senses were dazed and stupefied by excess of light.

It was not a very lively meal. Chrysander was silent, the duchesse was abstracted and rather ill-at-ease. Little Bob, at the head of the table, surveyed the whole party with meditative eyes. Conca alone kept up a graceful monologue on indifferent subjects, for which two, at least, of her auditors were sincerely grateful to her.

But even she had her secret discomforts. The boy's eyes were questioning, imperative, unsatisfied, as he lifted them to hers. They had an odd effect upon her, which she could not explain to herself. And presently when Love, grown fat and sleepy, came waddling out to the table, he gave her a recognising sniff, growled, and lay down as far as possible from her chair.

Bob's pale little face turned to her at once.

"Why does he do that, madame?"

She laughed uneasily.

"He does not like me, I suppose—he never did."

"Why doesn't he like you?"

"I do not know at all. It is a matter of taste—liking people—is it not, Monsieur Bob?"

She spoke with an effort at playfulness. The grave, childish face did not relax.

"I do not like people that Love doesn't like," Bob said severely.

The duchesse exclaimed at his rudeness. Chrysander glanced up from his plate, quickly and uncomfortably. Only Conca sat looking at the child in silence, with a sinister darkness in her eyes.

"Pray pardon him—he did not know what he was saying," Clothilde de Maillane exclaimed, distressed at the result of the boy's remark.

"I never pardon anything, madame," she said, in her soft, cold tones. "But I respect your son's sincerity."

No—there was no doubt about it. That breakfast on the terrace was anything but a success.

IX

AFTER they had gone back to the yacht, Madame de Maillane sat for a long time on the terrace, looking out at the sea. Bob had gone

off to fish for crabs in the rocks below the fish reserve, and she was alone.

She felt the influence of that vague discomfort which had been in the air all day, ever since the pale green figure of Conca leaped from the boat upon the little landing-stage. This woman had brought a jarring element into the peaceful monotony of life as it was lived in the Hérista. The sunshine seemed less golden since her advent, the sea wore a less radiant blue.

Clothilde hoped that the white yacht would soon disappear below the horizon—hoped it as fervently as she had ever hoped for anything in her life.

She had often wished to see Chrysander's wife, and now she had had her wish. It had brought her only pain—a pain she could not explain, or drive away. She pitied Chrysander as she would have pitied a man lying dangerously ill; and yet she did not know why she pitied him.

Perhaps he was not so much to be pitied after all. Perhaps he was even happy in his own way. Chrysander's idea of happiness, she remembered, had never coincided with hers.

And yet—his face haunted her, and hurt her. No, he was not happy—she was sure of it. She sighed, and left the terrace with an aching heart, feeling herself culpably responsible for his misery.

That night the Duchesse de Maillane was

awakened by a touch on her arm, which frightened her strangely until she recognised Bob's little white figure standing by her bed in the moonlight.

"Maman!"

"You naughty boy, how you startled me! What is the matter?"

Bob hesitated openly.

"Maman, might I come and sleep in here?"

"Why, dear?"

"Oh, I—I would rather, I think. May I, maman?"

The coaxing voice conquered her.

"Yes, if you like. What a nuisance you are, Bob!"

She took the little white figure in her arms and kissed the pale face.

"Why, Bob darling, you are trembling—what is the matter?"

He burst into a fit of crying which amazed her.

"Oh, maman, something frightened me horribly!"

For a long time she could get nothing else out of him. He had been frightened—horribly frightened—that was all he would say. She kissed him, and soothed him, and gradually the sobs ceased. He shook his head vaguely. He would not tell what he had seen.

"But you must have seen something?"

"Well, I—I thought some one came into my room."

"Nonsense, dear!"

"I thought so—really. I heard the door open, and then some one seemed to come and stand by the bed. It frightened me dreadfully, maman."

"But why, dear? Did you not see who it was?"

For a long time he would not say. There was not much light—the blinds were drawn. He was not sure—but certainly some one *did* come into the room, and *did* stand by the bed.

Madame de Maillane was anything but satisfied. The boy's odd and unusual fear seemed almost to communicate itself to her. She began to tremble, too, in sympathy with him. Then she, in her turn, began to coax, to entreat.

"But, dearest, you must tell me who it was—I am sure you know. I will give you anything you like if you will only tell me what you saw—what you think you saw."

Bob sat up, and appeared to consider the proposal.

"Anything I like?"

"Anything!" his mother said recklessly.

His eyes sparkled.

"Really, maman—on your word of honour?"

"Yes."

The fear of the supernatural vanished from Bob's philosophy.

"Then, may I have a gun, maman—a real gun, that shoots properly—may I?"

"Oh, Bob, of course not—you're too young. You would be shooting yourself—or me, perhaps."

Bob sighed.

"I knew you would say that," he remarked, in a tone of meek resignation. "I am very sorry, maman, but I am afraid I can not tell."

Madame de Maillane was desperate; in her desperation she did a foolish thing.

"Well, Bob, I will get you a gun if you will promise me that you will never touch it unless I am with you, and that you will never fire at anything unless M. Vaillot tells you—he must keep the gun, and teach you how to use it. Will that do?"

Bob reflected.

"If you will not let me have it any other way——"

"I certainly will not, so it is no use to think of that. And now tell me what you saw, like a good boy."

Bob sighed again. Perhaps he thought that he had not made a very good bargain. But he comforted himself with the somewhat Jesuitical reflection that, after all, he had not yet promised not to use the gun on his own account.

"Well maman—I think——"

"Yes?"

"I *think* what I saw was the—the lady from the yacht."

X

THE activity of the Duchesse de Maillane upon receiving this piece of information considerably surprised her son. In less than five minutes she had roused the whole household, and was giving clear if hurried orders for the searching of the villa.

The vague uneasiness which had been in her mind ever since Conca's arrival had taken definite shape at last. She owned to herself that she was quite as frightened as Bob, and also that she did not in the least know what she was frightened about. A more logical and sensible person than Clothilde would have argued that it was clearly improbable and impossible to the last degree that Conca would return surreptitiously to the villa and prowl about other people's bedrooms at night. But Clothilde had acted all her life upon impulse, as she did now. The improbability of the thing was perhaps what affected her most, and lent the very idea of this mysterious visit a singular unpleasantness all its own. Besides, Bob had said that he was sure what he saw was "the lady from the yacht," and she did not doubt either his eyesight or his word.

So the villa was searched by a party of astonished servants, headed by the duchesse herself in a picturesque disarray of dressing-gown and slippers. Of course nothing was found. Perhaps Clothilde, in her own mind, had not expected

seriously that anything would be found, for the fact did not in the least interfere with her conviction that Bob's midnight visitant was no creature of his own small but ingenious brain.

The search ended in the rather shamefaced exhaustion in which quests of that kind usually do end. The servants went back to bed, with the exception of Madame Vaillot, who lingered in her mistress's room after the rest had gone. There was an odd, anxious look upon her usually impassive face.

"Madame does not require anything more?"

Clothilde de Maillane was a fair reader of other people's thoughts. She looked at the woman for a moment before she answered.

"Yes," she said at last, "I think I do require—something. Shut the door, Henriette, and come here."

Madame Vaillot obeyed. Clothilde sat down and drew Bob against her knee.

"Now, Bob, tell Madame Vaillot what you told me."

Bob did as he was told, with tolerable fluency. He was already growing less shy of the relation of his adventure. He even added details to it which had escaped him before in his agitation. He was awake—he was quite sure of that. He thought something must have roused him—some noise. His eyes were open, and though the room was not very light, because the blinds were down, it was light enough to see the table

by the bed, and to make out the dark shadow of the door. He listened for a moment, and then he heard steps, and some one turned the handle of the door and came in. At first he thought it was his mother, and was not afraid. Then he seemed to feel that it was not his mother, and he grew frightened. He did not like to look, for a little while, and when he did look he saw some one standing by the bed, quite close to him. It was a woman, and he could not see her face clearly, but her hair was very light, and shone—he could see that—and he at once thought of Madame Chrysander. The hair was like her hair, and he was quite sure it must be her; and he was more uncomfortable than ever because he did not like her. He was very much afraid, and he lay quite still, and presently she went away. When he was sure she was quite gone, he went into his mother's room.

The boy told his story, and the two women listened. It was clear that Bob was fully persuaded of the identity of his midnight visitor, and though it was inconceivable that Madame Chrysander would have returned to the villa, yet——

Clothilde looked at Madame Vaillot, who was obviously uneasy.

"This is an extraordinary story, Henriette," she said a little sternly.

"Extraordinary, madame. But *she* was always extraordinary, if it comes to that."

Madame de Maillane felt oddly chilled by the

tacit admission of the possibility of the whole affair.

"Then you really think it was Madame Chrysander?"

Madame Vaillot shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"I, madame? I never think about Conca. She has done so many strange things that one gets used to them. Yes, I suppose that is it. It may have been that she came. M'sieu' Bob says so."

"She did come!" M'sieu' Bob put in, with conviction.

"But *why* did she come?"

"Oh, that I can not tell you, madame. Why has she done many things? Why did she make so great a fuss when we would have married her to Jean Méral, and yet run off with M. Chrysander? I am not saying anything against M. Chrysander, Heaven knows. He is a good gentleman enough, and a friend of madame, too. But why was it such a terrible thing to marry Jean Méral, and yet quite possible to marry M. Chrysander?"

Madame de Maillane smiled in the midst of her perplexity.

"But that is only human nature, Henriette. She did not love this Jean Méral, it seems."

"She did not love M. Chrysander," Madame Vaillot said briefly.

Clothilde did not discuss the point. In her

own mind she thought it likely enough, but it was not her affair.

"That is another thing. Why did she come here to-night—if she came?"

"I do not know, madame. I can not tell you."

The woman's face was obstinate, and impassive as stone. Clothilde saw that there was nothing to be got out of her.

"Very well. You may go."

Madame Vaillot turned to go. At the door she hesitated.

"To-morrow, if madame permits, I will bring M'sieu' Bob's bed in here," she said. "It is perhaps as well that he should not—not sleep in a room by himself."

XI

THAT was a night of unrest on the yacht, as well as at the villa.

Conca was very silent after her visit to Hérista. She sat on deck until late, watching Chrysander covertly, with sombre eyes. He was conscious of her scrutiny, and it made him vaguely uncomfortable. It would have affected him still more unpleasantly had not his own reflections been sufficiently perplexing to absorb most of his attention.

The evening passed in a silence that seemed sinister and gloomy. Still, Conca did not move

from her deck chair, or make any overtures for conversation. The moon came out and changed the ripples of the dark sea to silver. Chrysander was the first to speak.

"We will go on to Cannes to-morrow morning," he said quite suddenly and abruptly.

Conca did not answer at once. Then he heard her laugh softly to herself.

"So? And why, my dear Paul?"

"Because——"

He broke off. She rose quietly from her cushions, with the lazy, noiseless grace of a cat, and came and stood beside him.

"And why, my dear Paul?" she repeated, in her soft, clear tones.

She was so close to him that she almost touched him—so close that the pale sleeve of her dress brushed him where he stood. And then a curious thing happened.

As he stood there looking down at her in the darkness, there came to him once more that strange horror, that odd, illogical fear which he had felt for the first time on the night of his arrival in Hérasta. Once more he seemed to hear the quick breath of some nameless, inhuman thing in the gloom—once more he felt the terror of that strange presence which, itself invisible, yet had power to chill the blood in his veins to ice.

He bore it for a second or two until it grew to be more than even he could bear. Then

he struck out wildly at this something, which seemed approaching him in the gloom with steps which he could not hear.

He struck out at it—wildly. He struck the light figure standing beside him. With a short shrill cry of rage, or pain—he could not tell which—she recoiled from him, and staggered back against the rail.

For a moment he stood trembling. The horrible fear possessed him still, yet he comprehended what he had done. He made a step toward her, but the strange fear held him back. He tried to speak, but the words would not come. The moon came suddenly from behind a cloud and revealed her standing there, flung back against the slight rail, her pale draperies all wild and ruffled, her face white, terrified, and furious, her eyes dark with some emotion which he could not read, and the pearls at her throat gleaming with a dull, soft lustre in the light.

He found his speech suddenly.

“Conca—I did not mean it—I thought—forgive me—forgive me!”

She did not speak. With a swift, fierce gesture she waved him back and retreated, in her noiseless, rapid way, gliding like a shadow across the white deck.

“Conca!”

He called after her in vain. A second later she was gone, and he was left to face perhaps the worst moment of his life alone.

XII

HE leaned against the rail sick with fear, and with a kind of astonished contempt of that fear.

Why had he done it? Of what had he been so terribly afraid? Of the presence which he had felt that night on the terrace—or of the woman who had stood beside him?

His brain reeled before the question. The whole thing was inexplicable. He did not know what he had feared, he did not know why he had struck Conca. He only felt that for that moment something inexpressibly terrible and evil—something not earthly in any sense of the word—had been quite near to him, with a nearness that turned him cold when he contemplated it. It had been so near to him that he felt it—so near that it touched him—and the touch had filled him with a terror so awful that he had struck out at it, as he would have struck at a visible and tangible assailant.

And he had struck Conca!

A new terror seized upon him as he thought of it. Was he going mad? Was this sudden illogical fear which had come upon him but another form of insanity? Was that terror on the terrace, five years ago, a warning of the greater one to come?

He looked out into the sweet, violet night, blue with tender shadows, shot with lights like the sheen of a pearl. From the land the air came

down to him scented with the breath of the young pine-boughs, and the bitter fragrance of the mimosas. A single window at the villa showed a square of warm radiance against the exquisite mystery of the night.

He stood looking at it, and as he looked his terror vanished, and peace—a strange, still peace—came down upon him. He saw once more the face of Clothilde de Maillane, gracious, beautiful, and kindly. He felt the grasp of her strong, warm fingers on his own. After these five years of wild infatuation, of restless pursuit of something which for ever escaped him—the will-o'-the-wisp of a love which had never been his—he had come back once more into the presence of this woman, whose friendship for him had been the best thing in his life. He saw that now. He remembered the years through which her lightest wish had been everything to him, and he had enshrined her in his heart as the image of all perfection. He remembered her sweetness, her gaiety, her unfailing kindness to him. He remembered how ready she had always been to help him with his work. He had called her his inspiration in those days, and he knew that he had done nothing worthy of himself since they had ended. She had been the one person in the world who had exercised a supreme power over him, which she had never tried to abuse.

And for the sake of half a dozen careless words on a sheet of paper, he had cut himself off

from this friendship which meant so much to him. He had even tried to forget its very existence—but in that, at least, he had not succeeded. Now, at last, the blindness vanished from his eyes. He knew that Conca's mocking words were true. He loved Madame de Maillane to-day as he had always loved her—not with the love he had given to Conca, but with something infinitely higher and better, and in some subtle way more human. His passion for the face that mocked him, the voice that bewildered him, the strange elusive personality, which he could never quite grasp or understand, seemed to him at that moment like a kind of evil enchantment. He looked at it, for once, with a new impartiality, as at a thing detached from himself. He judged it fairly, weighed it, and found it wanting. It existed still; he had not escaped finally from its unholy power. Perhaps he had not the force of character ever wholly to escape. But, for the time at least, he saw it in its true light, and realised, with an intense bitterness, an infinite remorse and regret, the supreme folly of his infidelity to all that was best in his own nature, and to the memory of all the best years of his life.

Yes—Conca was right. He loved Clothilde de Maillane. Standing there, in the cool silence of the night, he knew it as, perhaps, he had never known it before. And he knew, too, that there was but one thing now for him to do—to leave Hérasta, to live the life he had made for himself

without her, as best he could, and never, if he could help it, to see her again. He had chosen for himself, and he must abide by his choice. He must be satisfied with it, so far as he could be satisfied. He must forget this higher and better thing which he had cast aside.

He stood very still, leaning against the slight, shining rail. His eyes were fixed, wistfully and sadly, upon the lighted window among the pines. What he had felt that morning on the terrace of the villa, he felt again now. For five years he had been living in an atmosphere which was strangely lacking in human warmth or sweetness. And now he was to go back to it again after an escape of an hour, which had served only to render it intolerable.

Yes, because the thing was inevitable, it was best to do it quickly. He stood for a moment more gazing out into the night. Then he turned away and went below, and made his way to Conca's cabin.

He realised, by the silence of the yacht, that he had remained longer on deck than he imagined. After a moment this silence began to oppress him as though with an actual and physical weight. The clear, bright stillness affected him unpleasantly, and he lingered at Conca's door before he tapped on the polished panels.

There was no answer. He waited, fingering the handle of the door with a curious hesitation. Then he turned it and went in.

This place was very light too. Everything was clearly defined—so clearly that to his eyes it seemed almost unnatural. The white and gold panelling, the bright unfaltering light, produced, to his eye, an effect of space and height which was, just at first, a little dazzling. Then he saw her lying with closed eyes, as though asleep.

He went over to her side and stood looking down at her. The soft curtains were looped back, and the clear light fell full upon her face. Here, too, were white and gold, bright, pronounced, without mystery—the white of the crumpled pillows, the gold of her loosened hair. The face seemed a shade paler than usual, but it bore no other trace of feeling.

Chrysander stood silent, looking down at her. He had come meaning to ask forgiveness, but the task was difficult. This beautiful enigma, lying pale and cold among her pillows, seemed somehow a thing immeasurably removed beyond the reach of any entreaty of his. He had a strange disinclination to touch her, to wake the spirit which slept behind those shut eyes.

The place was very still. The white and gold colouring was brilliant under the cold, soft light. Yet in Chrysander's mind a doubt was beginning to grow—a doubt which was perilously like fear.

He was afraid of that fear which he had felt on deck—horribly afraid. It seemed to him that it was near him, even now, as he bent over the sleeping figure of Conca. The silence had

grown significant, mysterious. For a moment he stood with all his nerves on edge, waiting—he did not know for what.

Then the courage of desperation seized him. He would do, at least, what he had come to do. It did not require much effort, surely, to kiss the pale face of this sleeping girl, to wake her with words of penitence and affection. He had struck her, hurt her perhaps, frightened her certainly. An odd tenderness and remorse rose up in him as he realised that fact.

He bent down quickly, almost impulsively.

But, as he did so, that strange terror sprang up in him again like a living thing seizing him by the throat. It held him back as though with palpable hands. It gripped him in its hideous grasp, here, in the brilliantly lighted room, just as it had done before upon the darkened deck.

He drew back. Quite suddenly he knew that he was afraid of this—this beautiful, sleeping thing, which lay there with closed eyes, and gentle breath, a picture of innocent rest. He was afraid of her—he dared not touch even the hand, starred with pearls, which lay within an inch of his own. A strange barrier of horror had risen between him and her.

He stood there, torn by conflicting passions, longing for flight, yet reluctant to go. For the worst of it all was that he loved her still—that in the midst of his fear of her was a terrible conviction of his own utter solitude without her.

He had nothing else in the world but this thing which he feared. He would have given all he possessed to touch her hand, to call her, to convince himself of the madness of his terror, the unreality of this barrier of the existence of which he was yet so painfully certain. But an invisible hand seemed to hold him back.

And in the silence it seemed to him once more that a living thing, which was not human with any humanity known to men, was watching his terror with cold, malevolent eyes. He turned rapidly and left the room, and found himself alone, trembling in every limb.

From behind the closed door came a sound—so slight that he could not have told its exact nature, it might have been a laugh, which had in it a hint of despair, of tragedy; it might have been a sob, which yet held a suggestion of ironical mirth.

He turned quickly, went to his music-room, and locked himself in.

XIII

THE morning came again, glorious with gold and rose, with exquisite mists upon the hills and still more exquisite clearnesses upon the sea. Cap Roux reared his bald red crown proudly against the perfect sky. Below this the grey, pointed towers of the Château d'Hérista hung

above the still waters, and seemed to frown at their vivid reflection beneath.

Chrysander woke early—if he had slept at all, of which he was by no means certain. The night had been one of nightmares and visions, of terror and regret. With the first ray of light he rose and went on deck. By some trick of atmosphere the grey castle looked very near. A sudden compunction seized him. He looked at the yacht's little white boat rocking in its wake and could not resist the temptation it suggested.

Slowly, in the clear silence of the morning, he rowed across the quiet bay, and moored his boat to the great iron ring at the landing place. Once more he climbed the green and slippery steps to the terrace.

The terrace lay broad and empty in the early sunlight. The blue and gold banner hung motionless on the flagstaff. The rude stone figure of the first Dauphin d'Hérista brandished his scimitar as of old. Time, Chrysander felt, meant very little in the Château d'Hérista.

The small door leading into the hall stood open. He hesitated for a moment and then went in.

The hall looked hardly more dusty, majestic, and dilapidated than it had done five years ago. The banners seemed a shade more spectral and unreal, that was all. At the big table Sarrasin himself sat breakfasting upon a frugal repast of hot coffee, new bread, and figs.

He looked up and saw his visitor, and for an instant a rather singular expression rested on his face. Then he rose, and came forward with outstretched hand, and all his old grave cordiality.

"So you have come to see me, after all?" he said. "Well, I do not mind admitting now that I did not expect it. Perhaps that was why I was beginning the day in an uncommonly bad temper—which is an evil practice, so M. le Curé says." He laughed his deep, soft laughter that was so good to hear. "You know that you are always welcome," he added. "Luckily there are plenty of figs, and old Marthe has just had a fit of industry, and baked some very good bread. Sit down, my dear M. Chrysander, and have breakfast with a man who has not talked to a stranger for five years."

"I hope I am not a stranger," Chrysander said, smiling. He was both touched and pleased by the sincerity of the Dauphin's welcome.

Sarrasin laughed again.

"I am sorry to say that you are very much of a stranger—to me. Do you know that I have actually felt lonely since you went away? I never thought about it before. I had been alone all my life, I suppose, except——" A shadow crossed his face, and he did not finish the sentence. "Yes, after you left I was decidedly lonely. I thought once of going to Paris, and *seeing you.*"

"Why did you not come? I should have been delighted."

Sarrasin smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"So should I. But I had no money, you see," he said simply. "I am not a millionaire, as you know. So I had to content myself with the thought, and remain where I was. But I have often wondered how you were."

"How stupid of me—I might have written to you!" Chrysander said repentantly.

"Oh, do not trouble yourself about that. Of what could you write to me, after all? I am such a very remote person, I hardly even speak your language," the Dauphin said rather sadly. "It is only when you are here with me that you can understand that I am really a human being, like yourself, and that we are very good friends—as we always were, I think. But it is pleasant to see you again. I hope madame is well?"

"Quite well."

Sarrasin looked at him intently for a moment.

"It seems so odd to think of her as different from what she was!" he said frankly. "But I suppose she has changed very much—as we all have. I feel very old, sometimes," he added, smiling.

"You do not look it."

"No? Perhaps not, but that does not alter the fact that I often feel so. It is my life, I suppose. There is so little in it, that the years seem longer than they really are. Once or twice I have felt that I should like to see your world, and

try a different sort of existence before it all ends; but I do not think it would suit me any better than my own."

"What has put all this into your head?"

"I do not know—idleness, I should think. There have been no fish in the Rade for three days, and that state of things does not agree with me," laughed the Dauphin. "Come, you are not eating much of a breakfast. Drink your coffee before it is cold, and let me give you some more."

Chrysander obeyed. He watched his host curiously as he poured out the coffee, and handed him the plate of figs. There was certainly a slight yet distinct change in Sarrasin d'Hérista.

"The Duchesse de Maillane is here," Chrysander remarked presently.

The Dauphin's face was bent over his plate, and Chrysander could not see his features when he answered.

"Yes. She has been here all the winter."

"You see her often?"

"At a distance. I have only spoken to her once. I am honoured by her son's acquaintance, though," Sarrasin said, with his fine smile. "He comes fishing with me sometimes. I do not think she quite approves of me, but the child wants a playfellow, though I imagine I am not altogether cut out for one. But we get on very well. He is a nice child, that—and he adores his mother."

"That is natural," Chrysander said, rather sadly.

"Yes—but she deserves it. You can not always say that. She deserves most things, I fancy," the Dauphin added, half to himself.

"She has not had them."

"No? You know all about that, of course."

The remark was half a question. Chrysander answered it in his own way.

"I do not think her life has been a happy one, as most people count happiness. Her husband was not a success. He was a good fellow, in his way, but he did not mean much to her. And he did not care for her."

Sarrasin looked up quickly.

"He must have been a remarkable individual. One would call it original, I should think, to have a wife like that and not to care for her."

"He was very original," Chrysander answered, rather bitterly.

Sarrasin stared reflectively into the depths of his coffee.

"That is up-to-date, I believe," he said after a momentary silence. "To me it seems exceedingly absurd. You have a wife who is beautiful and charming, and who, if you choose to take a little trouble to make her do so, would probably love you very much. Because she is your wife, and you are a fool, you neglect her, and run after some other woman who is not half as beautiful or as charming, simply because she is some other

man's property instead of yours. That is what is called human nature, but I must confess I have never understood why."

"You put it plainly, at any rate," Chrysander said, amused, in spite of himself, by the Dauphin's final tone.

"I always put things plainly. I am not clever enough to do anything else. It is because I see things plainly, I suppose."

"I think you do."

Chrysander sighed as he said it, for it was true. This man saw things plainly, and dealt with them plainly too. It was, perhaps, because he was too strong to care for subterfuges, or indeed to have any need for them. He was strong with a strength that woke a little envy in Chrysander, though he would not have admitted it.

"There is one thing I forgot to ask," he said suddenly. "What of the devils of Héristera?"

"The devils——?"

"You said that you believed in them five years ago. I do not know if you have changed your opinions."

"I never change opinions of that sort," Sarasin said quite calmly. "Yes, I believe in them. But I have not seen any lately."

Chrysander was silent for a while. Then he spoke, quickly, on the impulse of the moment:

"One was very near me last night!"

XIV

THE silence which followed Chrysander's silence was impressive, and in a way significant. The Dauphin d'Hérista sat very still, looking straight before him with his grave, clear eyes.

"That is not a pleasant thing to hear," he said presently. "I hope you are wrong."

"I am not wrong. I felt it. I do not believe in the supernatural. I have never believed in anything of that kind. But something happened last night which I can not explain. It has happened before, and I could not explain it then. I would not speak of it to any one else, but I think you will understand, and I am sure you will not laugh at it."

"No—I shall not laugh at it."

"I felt it before, the first night I came to the villa, five years ago. I felt as if some one was near me. That sounds very simple, but the feeling was not simple at all—nor pleasant. Whatever the thing was, it was not human. It was terrible—it was, in some way, evil. It hurt me. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Sarrasin d'Hérista said quietly.

"I have felt it once or twice since—but never since I went back to Paris, until last night. And last night"—he shivered involuntarily at the memory of that horrible sensation—"it came back."

"Tell me."

"I was standing on deck, talking to my wife. And it came upon me suddenly, more suddenly than it ever did before. It seemed like something approaching me slowly, stealthily, like a wild beast. I struck out at it."

There was an instant's silence, and Chrysander hesitated.

"I struck Conca," he said at last.

The Dauphin made a sudden movement, and uttered a sudden exclamation. Chrysander looked at him, with a vague feeling of alarm.

"I could not help it." He put out his hand and laid it on the Dauphin's arm. "Sarrasin, do you think I am going mad?"

The Dauphin rose from his chair, and stood, tall and still, beside the table. There was a very real agitation in his look.

"My dear M. Chrysander—my dear friend," he said, "you must leave Hérista—at once."

"But why?"

"I can not tell you why. It would only make things worse if I were to tell you, for then you would see. There are some things which are best not seen, and this is one of them. But you must leave Hérista."

"But what is it—this thing which affects me in this extraordinary way?"

"Once again, I can not tell you. Do not press me, for it is quite impossible. If you knew what it was you would know how much better it is that I should not tell you. Go back to Paris—

to the world—to your work—and never come back to Hérista. That is all that I can say.”

“I do not think Conca will go.”

The Dauphin d’Hérista shrugged his shoulders.

“She is your wife. I suppose she will do what you wish. If you wish to go back to Paris, she must go too.”

Chrysander smiled in the midst of his perplexity.

“Your ideas of marriage are still a little mediæval, I am afraid.”

Sarrasin smiled—suddenly and strangely—a smile that lent a sinister expression to his dark face.

“Then go—and leave her here,” he said. “Go back to Paris. Leave her here—with the devils of Hérista.”

XV

CHRYSANDER rowed back to the yacht no wiser than he had left it, and certainly more perplexed. He was firmly convinced that he could not go back to Paris without Conca, even had he the inclination to do so. In his own mind he was sure that she would not leave Hérista yet. Therefore, he must stay.

And in the midst of his terror of this fear which he could not explain, and which no one else seemed at all disposed to explain for him,

there was a certain curiosity. He felt that he could never be content until he unravelled this mystery which baffled him. He felt that, unless he could once explain to himself the cause of this strange fear, and explain it successfully, it would haunt him for ever—even in Paris. It had gained a new power over him since his return to Hérستا. It was ten times stronger than it had been five years ago, and therefore the curiosity attendant upon it was ten times stronger too. He could not thrust it aside as he had once been able to do. No—he could not obey the Dauphin's command. He could not leave Hérستا.

Conca was sitting on deck when he reached the yacht. He went and stood beside her in painful embarrassment. It struck him that she seemed to shrink together within her green draperies at his approach. Her eyes avoided his.

He stood silent, not knowing what to say. Presently, in the silence, he heard her laugh—softly, yet with a strangely unpleasant sound. Any expression of penitence which he might have been preparing to utter was frozen upon his lips.

“Are you better, Paul?” she said, almost flippantly.

“Better?”

“Yes. You were very mad last night, you know. You hurt me. Are you not going to say you are sorry?”

“I am more sorry than I can say.”

She laughed again.

"Poor dear Paul! Do you know," she added in a different tone, "that, just for a moment, you were almost imposing? I was quite afraid of you. I thought you were going to kill me. It was quite a new sensation, that—to be afraid of you."

She gave the pronoun an emphasis which vaguely suggested contempt. Then she rose from her chair and stood, for an instant, a green, shadowy figure in the sunlight.

"I am going on shore to sit on the rocks. Will you come too, Paul?"

She had lifted her eyes at last, and she fixed them upon him as she spoke. They were cold, grey, unfathomable as ever; yet in their depths lingered a dull flame.

"No," Chrysander said quickly.

She looked at him for an instant more.

"Why?"

"Because——"

He broke off. In his heart he knew that he was afraid to go with her; but he would not say so.

"Well—why?"

"Because I have some business letters to write."

"Oh!" She lingered still, and a strange smile crossed her face. "You mean you are afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of me," she said softly.

Chrysander made a desperate effort to answer, to deny what she said; but the words died away on his lips. She waited still, looking at him with that inscrutable smile. There was something almost ghastly in the smile, in her silence.

Then she turned away, smiling still, and left him.

XVI

BOB DE MAILLANE was not a young gentleman who was at all inclined to overlook maternal promises. In a moment of weakness his mother had promised him a gun; and he had no intention of not profiting by the fact. He took an early opportunity of reminding her of her indiscretion.

"Maman," he remarked, as they sat on the terrace some days after Chrysander's arrival at Hérستا, "when are you going to get me that gun?"

Madame de Maillane was also scrupulous in the matter of promises; but she looked at her small son with a doubtful countenance.

"Will nothing else do, Bob?"

"No, maman."

"Would you not like a—a Kodak, for instance?" Clothilde ventured rather despairingly.

"Yes, maman—but I should like the gun, too."

"But what has put it into your silly little head to want a gun?"

Bob's previous career had not been marked by any fervent leanings toward war or sport. He hesitated a moment.

"The Dauphin has a gun, maman."

"Oh, I see." Clothilde laid down the book she had been reading, and laughed a little ruefully. "Do you know, Bob, I am getting jealous of this Dauphin of yours?"

Bob was a solemn little boy. He very seldom laughed, and when he indulged in merriment it was of rather an eerie and Puck-like character. He did not smile now, but regarded his mother thoughtfully.

"Jealous? But why, maman?"

"Because I believe you like him better than you like me."

Bob considered. Then he shook his odd little head in its vast country hat.

"That is quite different," he announced, with conviction. "The Dauphin is a man, you know."

"Oh, I know that well enough," Clothilde answered, with a touch of irritation. Perhaps she was really a little jealous, as she said—not altogether without cause. Bob was devoted to her, and she to him, but she was clever enough to know that a boy's devotion to a woman is not the same as his devotion to a man. And Bob's boundless admiration for the fisher-prince of Hérستا was not altogether to his mother's taste.

"I know that well enough," she repeated. "Would you like me better if I was a man, M'sieu' Bob?"

"No. You are a woman," Bob said cuttingly. "You could never be a man, and shoot, and catch fish, and sail boats."

Clothilde laughed again.

"I could shoot, and catch fish, and sail boats, if I tried; if all that constitutes being a man," she said. "Well, Bob, I wish you would tell me why you are so fond of M. d'Hérista."

Bob considered. He was given to consideration, and a certain measured dignity of speech.

"I do not think I know," he said at last. "You see he is different to any one else."

"Is he? How?"

"Well, he—he is a good deal bigger than most people, for one thing."

Bob, being a very small boy, adored any one possessed of an abnormal quantity of inches.

"And he is nicer, too," he added thoughtfully.

"What does he do that is nicer, pray?"

Bob thought with great earnestness.

"I think he does not talk much," he remarked at last, "and he always talks about things I can understand. And—and he does not use long words, and play the piano, like M. Chrysander."

Chrysander had been up to the villa pretty frequently during those few days—generally

alone—and Bob had evidently been comparing him with his idol, very much to that idol's advantage.

Clothilde was half annoyed, half amused, by his criticism of her sometime friend.

"If he can not play the piano, and M. Chrysander can, that shows that M. Chrysander is much cleverer than he is," she said.

"I dare say he is, but you do not like people because they are clever."

"Sometimes you admire them."

"I don't," Bob said bluntly.

"You are a silly little boy. What else does this wonderful Dauphin do?"

"He wears much nicer clothes than M. Chrysander," Bob continued, still evidently bent upon that species of comparison which certainly may be considered odious. "And the château is a beautiful place. I caught twenty-five spiders there yesterday—large ones—and the Dauphin says that the cellars are full of frogs," he added, in a tone of keen appreciation.

"My dear Bob! I hope you did not bring the—the *whole* twenty-five spiders home," his mother said anxiously. She knew Bob far too well to hope that all those treasures had been left behind.

Bob sighed, with an air of conscious self-denial.

"No, maman, I only brought the fifteen fattest ones home," he said; "I knew you would

not like all of them at the villa, and M. le Dauphin is keeping the other ten in his bedroom for me. He *promised* that they should not get away, but I'm afraid——" Bob broke off, unable to face the terrible thought of the lost spiders. "I think I will go over and see if they are all right," he added, rising from his seat.

"Well, take care of yourself, and do not be late for *déjeuner*."

"May I stay to *déjeuner* with M. le Dauphin, maman?"

"Oh, if you like—and he asks you. Do not worry him, Bob."

"Worry him!" Bob's tone was indignant. "He—he likes to have me, maman."

Clothilde drew the child to her and kissed him warmly.

"Of course he does, dear. Run along and enjoy yourself with your Dauphin."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when a step sounded on the gravel, and a tall blue figure came between her and the bay. Sarrasin d'Hérستا stood before her, gravely removing his broad hat. She looked up and smiled at him, not without a certain effort. She wondered whether he had heard what she said.

If he had, he seemed indifferent, though she was conscious that the phrase, "your Dauphin," had sounded a little spiteful.

"Good-morning, madame! I came to see if

you would allow your son to go fishing this afternoon."

Madame de Maillane looked at Bob's small white face. It was radiant with trembling hope, and she could not find it in her heart to deny him.

"You are very good, monsieur," she said rather formally. "If you are sure Bob is no trouble to you——"

Sarrasin smiled down at the little eager face. The smile was sufficient answer, even to Madame de Maillane. She looked at him a little curiously as he stood there.

"He is no trouble," he said, in his quiet, deep voice. "Thank you, madame. He may as well come with me now, if he has nothing else to do."

"Yes." Clothilde was still watching him. "I shall be very dull without him, you know," she added suddenly, with a pretty, quick smile.

"Oh, maman, why don't you come, too?"

Bob's voice was eager. She laughed again, and coloured in the shadow of her great hat.

"You stupid child! You have just told me that I can not catch fish, or sail boats, or do anything sensible. And M. le Dauphin does not want to be worried by my ignorance."

Sarrasin was looking at her with his grave, direct glance.

"If you will come," he said, "I shall be only too pleased. And we will take good care of you—will we not, Bob?"

"Oh, do come, maman," Bob murmured fervently.

Clothilde wavered, looking at them both. She was angry with herself for having seemed to fish for an invitation, though quite innocent of any intention to do so. She told herself that she did not really want to go, that she hated boats, which were things calculated to spoil your clothes, and that it was, besides an exceedingly impossible arrangement to go fishing with the Dauphin to whom she had only spoken once or twice in her life. But, all the time, there remained at the back of her consciousness a conviction that this man was taking Bob away from her, and that she wanted to dispute the possession of her child with him. And since Bob would insist upon being friends with the Dauphin d'Hérista, why should she not find out if he was really the kind of person she liked Bob's friends to be?

Therefore, she wavered; and in the act consented.

"Are you sure I shall not be a nuisance? I do not know anything about fishing, and I hate killing things. If you catch anything, I shall certainly want you to let it go," she said, laughing.

Sarrasin laughed too. She decided that she

liked him when he laughed. Gaiety sat very well upon his dark face.

"We will do exactly as you like, if you will only come," he said, and his voice was as eager as Bob's had been. It pleased her, somehow—this eagerness. It made the unapproachable Dauphin seem almost boyish, and very unlike the person she had once described to Chrysander as possessed of the evil eye, and sold by his ancestors to the devil.

"Well—perhaps I can prevent Bob throwing himself overboard in his excitement," she said. "Yes—I will come."

XVII

It was with rather complex feelings that Clothilde de Maillane stepped that afternoon into the Dauphin's boat.

Even at the last moment she had entertained a vague intention of excusing herself, and refusing to go. She had always avoided the Dauphin d'Hérista, from various motives, some of which, it must be confessed, were a little childish and conventional. In the first place, she had always been superstitious, and she had really more than half-believed her assertion that Sarrasin possessed the evil eye. In the second place, it was a little difficult to include in your visiting list a man who happens to be by birth the greatest

personage in the district, and, by profession, your fishmonger. The difficulty had never occurred to Chrysander, but then Chrysander was a man, and the Duchesse de Maillane was—the Duchesse de Maillane. It was true that she cared very little for the conventions, but she had never yet quite decided what to do with the Dauphin d'Hérista, or how to do it. Finally, she bowed to him when she saw him, as she would have bowed to any one else of her acquaintance, and bought his fish. It was a compromise, and, she felt, rather a mean one.

She had once endeavoured to induce her husband to go over to the château and make a state call upon the Dauphin, but Louis de Maillane, whose great-grandfather had been a coachman in the service of the First Consul, and who was therefore entitled to pick and choose his friends with a due regard to their social standing, read her a little lecture on the extreme folly of knowing clearly impossible people, and politely refused to go. Clothilde had never felt quite so contemptuous of any one in her life as she felt of her husband on that occasion; but she was also a little relieved by his refusal.

And now she was preparing to countenance this man from whom she had always held a little aloof—and why? Because Bob had fallen in love with the spiders and frogs of the Château d'Hérista!

She was inclined to regard the situation as

a little ridiculous, but, when the orange-sailed boat glided alongside the landing-stage she had not the heart to disappoint Bob. Perhaps, also, she would have been sorry to disappoint the Dauphin himself. She smiled as she gave him her hand to help her into the boat.

"You see I have not changed my mind," she said. "I hope you will not catch anything, though."

The Dauphin laughed.

"I did not think you would change your mind, madame," he answered simply, "but, as I came out to fish, I will do myself the honour of catching as much as I can—for your dinner."

The boat glided out across the bay. It passed quite close to the white steam-yacht. Conca, lying in her deck chair, saw it, and stared at it for a moment with soft grey eyes. Chrysander, who was reading near her, did not look up.

The boat was so close, that Clothilde de Maillane heard the scroop of the chair-legs on the deck, as Conca raised herself from her cushions.

"Paul," she said, in a clear voice, "there is your friend Madame de Maillane."

Chrysander dropped his book. Clothilde looked up, smiling and nodding to them both. The Dauphin and Bob stood bareheaded in the sunlight, gravely returning the salutation of the green and white figure above them.

Conca did not move for a moment; then, as the boat passed the yacht, she rose and leaned over the rail, looking down at Sarrasin d'Hérista.

"*Bon jour*, M. le Dauphin," she said lightly. "Have you forgotten me?"

Clothilde de Maillane, who happened to be looking at the Dauphin's face, started slightly. It was hard, unresponsive—almost menacing: there was a strange anger in his eyes.

"No, madame," he answered curtly, "I have not—forgotten you."

The wind caught the orange sail and hurried the boat away. Madame de Maillane did not speak. Little Bob moved suddenly to the Dauphin's side, and patted his bare arm with one little sunburnt hand. There was a queer, silent suggestion of sympathy in the child's action, which did not escape his mother.

"Why do you do that, Bob?" she asked.

He looked at her with an odd, childish gravity, and did not reply. She felt the rebuke, and turned to the Dauphin.

"He does not like Madame Chrysander," she said. "Is it not curious?"

Sarrasin d'Hérista was busy with the sail. He did not look at her as he replied.

"A child's instinct, and an animal's instinct, are very much alike, madame," he said quietly. "Neither an animal nor a child analyses what it feels, and so it is always right. Older people confuse themselves with theories, with conven-

tional ideas. A child likes, or dislikes; a dog likes, or dislikes—and that is all. They do not know or care why—the fact is enough for them. And you may always trust a feeling of that kind.”

Clothilde said nothing for a moment.

“You do not like Madame Chrysander either,” she remarked quite suddenly.

Sarrasin shrugged his shoulders.

“I? That does not matter. I am a man, not a child. My likings and dislikes are not the same thing. But if Bob dislikes a person, he has a reason—or rather, he has no reason at all. That shows that the person is really to be disliked.”

He smiled, but his tone was grave. Clothilde saw that he meant what he said.

“But why should he dislike her? Why——” she hesitated for a second. “Why should I dislike her? You see, I am quite frank with you, M. d’Hérasta. I dislike Madame Chrysander as much as Bob does—and I do not in the least know why.”

Sarrasin sat down and began to bait his hooks.

“Do not try to find out why you dislike her, madame,” he said, “but—do not try to conquer your dislike. It is an instinct. I think,” he added reflectively, “that Heaven sends us such instincts at times, to protect us——”

He broke off.

“Against what?”

He laughed, but her ear detected a meaning behind his laughter.

"How should I know against what, madame? Against the devil—perhaps."

Madame de Maillane looked back at the white yacht, at the pale green figure still leaning over the shining side; and a shiver shook her in spite of the sunlight.

"You frighten me!" she said quickly.

Sarrasin's eyes met hers as he looked up from his hook. Some feeling which she could not read had changed the sincerity of his face for a moment.

"You need not be afraid, madame"; and he added in a lower tone, with an accent that struck her as almost savage, "do you suppose I would let anything hurt you?"

XVIII

THAT night, when Bob said good-night to his mother, it occurred to him to ask her a question.

"How do you like him, maman?"

Clothilde started a little, and then laughed.

"How do I like whom, M'sieu' Bob?"

"The Dauphin."

Clothilde thought for a minute. She was unconsciously changing the opinion—or, to speak more accurately, the prejudice—of several years.

"I like him very much," she said at last. "I am glad you are fond of him, dear."

Bob gave a sigh of genuine pleasure.

"Really, maman? And you are not jealous?"

"No. M. d'Hérista is the finest sort of person I have met for a good many years," Clothilde said, with a sudden generosity characteristic of her. She felt that she owed the Dauphin an apology for her old distrust, and she paid the debt freely.

"And you will come fishing again, maman?"

Clothilde laughed, with an odd little touch of confusion.

"No, dear. I do not think I shall go fishing again."

XIX

CONCA lay silent on deck for a long time after the Dauphin's boat had passed the yacht. A change had come over her since her return to Hérista—a change of which Chrysander was keenly and very uncomfortably conscious. He had grown used to her flippancy, to the odd, mocking heartlessness with which she seemed to regard life during those five long years in Paris. He had grown used to her absolutely unresponsive attitude toward himself, though it had chilled his heart with a deadly coldness. He had taught himself to regard her words, her actions, as final and irrevocable, and not to be

altered by any action of his. He knew that he could never change that strange, almost inhuman nature, any more than he could put warmth or tenderness into the light, cold fingers, the touch of which always sent such a curious thrill through him. He recognised that Conca was, in some way, a creature apart from others, a thing not to be judged by the ordinary standards of humanity. And this very quality in her was not without a certain fascination of its own for him.

But she had altered since they came back to Hérista. She was very seldom flippant—she hardly took the trouble to speak. Her eyes were always fixed upon the moving water, with an intentness of gaze which began to affect Chrysander unpleasantly. It was as though something in that blue expanse had power to enchain all her attention, to draw her away from him into a place where he could not follow. She had always been, in some subtle way, which had by turns maddened and infatuated him, a thing remote from his comprehension—a perpetual query, as she herself had said. He had always felt that behind the grey mask of those cool, mysterious eyes was hidden some strange spirit which he could not reach, and which for ever disdained and eluded him.

He looked at her now as she lay back among her pale cushions, gazing at the sea. Her face was grave, her eyes were half-closed; yet beneath

the long lashes he fancied he saw a light, vague, mysterious, inexplicable. And there came upon him a mood of desperation, an odd recklessness of what might happen—a contempt even of his own terrible fear. He would have given life itself to have read the riddle in those inscrutable eyes.

He rose from his seat and stood beside her.

"I am going on shore for a walk, Conca," he said. "Will you come with me?"

She lifted her eyes and surveyed him with a look of surprise.

"You wish me to come with you—on the rocks?"

"Yes."

She rose lazily, drawing the pale green draperies about her with one hand. The other she laid for an instant on his arm.

"You are very brave to-day, Paul. Yes, I will come—on the rocks!" She laughed very softly and held his arm more tightly as she spoke. "Are you sure you are not afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, very well. I will come."

Chrysander was conscious of a sensation of relief as she released him. She did not speak again until they reached the shore and stood watching the boat return to the yacht. Then she turned to him with her mysterious and half-suggestive smile.

"Are you enjoying yourself, Paul? There is still time to call the boat back, you know."

"I do not care to call it back."

"No? Well, let us go into the forest. It is too hot to sit on the rocks—yet."

They took the little path by the river, where the fish leaped now and then in the dark shadows of the boughs, and the long, overgrown daisies on their weak stalks sprawled across the thin grass.

"Do you remember," Conca said presently, "how you met me here one night when you were at the villa? I had been fishing, and you were sitting under that tree, and I found you there."

"I remember it very well."

"And I told you that animals were afraid of me—do you remember that?"

"Yes."

"I told you that all the people in Hérستا were afraid of me—and that you were afraid, too. Do you remember that as well?"

"Of course."

She stood still, looking before her meditatively into the air.

"But I did not believe what I said—then. I did not really believe you were afraid of me. I hoped so much that you were not, that I—I would not believe it." There was a touch of wistful pathos in her tone. "I would not believe *it*, though it was true." She turned to him sud-

denly, with a different expression from any he had ever seen on her face—an expression of real gratitude. “You are always kind to me, Paul, I wish—I wish—you were not afraid.”

“But I am not afraid, Conca—at least, I am not afraid of you.”

She shook her head.

“Do not say that—it is not true. You are afraid of me. Every one is afraid of me—do you not know that, by this time? And I have so wished it to be different!” she said, with a sudden, strange passion in her voice, “but it has been like this always—all my life. If there had been any one in the world who would not have been afraid—or anything, even a dog——” she laughed fiercely and bitterly, but there were tears in her eyes—“it would have broken down the barrier.”

“The barrier?”

“Is it not a barrier? I suppose you would call it an antipathy. There is a barrier round me that cuts me off from you—you know that.”

“No—there is not!” Chrysander said quickly.

“Yes. The other night when we were on the yacht and you struck me, I understood. I knew that nothing could alter it, after that. Perhaps, if you had ever really loved me, it would have been different. Perhaps that would have broken the spell.”

“What spell?”

She did not answer. The sadness in her face touched him.

"Conca, do not talk like this," he said very earnestly. "How can you say I never really loved you? I loved you then, and I love you still—as far as you will let me."

She smiled, gently and sadly, without a trace of her usual eerie amusement.

"Ah—that is just where the secret lies. If I could let you! Do you not know that I would let you love me, if I could—that I would love you, if I could? It is not my will that prevents it—it is I—I myself." She struck her breast with a strange gesture of hatred, of anger. "It is this!"

"What do you mean?"

"You can not understand—you would not believe me if I told you. But I am different from you—I am not what you are. In Paris I forgot it. But here—here I know."

"Then let us go back to Paris."

"No, I can not do that. It is as though I had left a part of myself here, when I went away, and forgotten its existence—almost. I lived another life, I became, very nearly, a different person—as far as it was possible, for me. But now that I have come back, the other part of myself has seized upon me again, like something alive and terrible—terrible!" She repeated the word with a kind of horror which cut Chrysander to the heart. "It holds me, it drags me

down," she said in a strangled voice, as though speaking to herself. "Oh, you are right to be afraid of it—even I am afraid of it sometimes!"

The sincerity of her words—a sincerity too painful to be doubted, even though the words themselves were incomprehensible—was not to be borne. Chrysander could not listen unmoved to that strange half-confession—of what? He did not understand—he might never understand, but with a sudden impulse of ungovernable pity and passion he took the slight green figure in his arms.

"Conca—Conca, for God's sake do not speak like that! What is this terrible thing that has come upon us both?"

He felt her shudder slightly, as though his cry suggested only a fresh horror to her; but she did not make any resistance. And then, quite suddenly, she burst into a passion of tears, heart-broken, uncontrollable, which seemed to shake her like a violent tempest, from head to foot. Instinctively, he felt that it was vain to offer consolation. He was dumb and helpless before this despair, which was so incomprehensible to him, and yet so real.

After a time her sobs ceased. She drew herself away from him and looked up. Her face was pale, her eyes were bright with tears; but at that moment she seemed to him beautiful, with a beauty she had never worn before. The

shadow was gone from her eyes, the coldness from her speech.

"Let me go," she said gently. "You can do no more for me, Paul."

"I have never done anything for you," Chrysander answered.

"You have tried to do a great deal. If you have not succeeded, it is not your fault, but mine. Do not think of it any more."

There was nothing to be done but to submit to her wish. Chrysander looked at her sadly and wonderingly; but he saw that it was impossible to question her further as to her strange agitation.

"Let us go," he said patiently. "We can sit on the rocks now."

Her face changed suddenly, with an expression of terror, of entreaty. She made a step toward him and held out her hands.

"Oh, no—no!" she cried, in a strange voice. "Not on the rocks, Paul—never on the rocks! I am not quite a devil. Once I would have done it, but not now—not now! Paul—listen—I want you to promise me something."

"I will promise you whatever you wish," Chrysander said, amazed by her earnest tone.

She went on speaking, rapidly, passionately, with that strange agony of entreaty in her face.

"Paul—you know that sometimes I go out at night—I row myself across the bay, and go and sing on the rocks as I used to do when I

was a girl here. You know that, you asked me once why I did. Swear to me that you will never follow me—that you will never prevent me from going.”

Chrysander hesitated.

“Is it not a strange promise to make me give you?”

The question did not turn her from her purpose.

“Yes; it is strange—I know that. But I ask you to do it; I implore you to do it. I am asking for your own sake, as well as for mine. Will you not promise, when I wish it so much?”

Chrysander looked at her for a moment in silence.

“Yes—I promise,” he said at last.

She smiled at him, the smile of a child to whom some one gives a long-desired toy. The look was extraordinarily pathetic, after the passion of her grief, and the intensity with which she had demanded his promise.

“Thank you,” she said simply. “That is very good of you. But you are always good, Paul.”

Then she turned from him quickly.

“The light is going,” she said, with something of her usual careless tone. “Let us get back to the yacht.”

XX

ALL that evening Conca was unusually gay, unusually restless. She made Chrysander play to her; she was unusually gentle to him. Once or twice, looking up unexpectedly, he caught her eye fixed on him with an expression which had in it something of regret, he thought—and yet she seemed entirely to have forgotten their conversation in the forest.

It grew very late, and still she showed no sign of weariness. Her eyes were brilliant, her small, pale face was flushed with a faint colour. Her laughter rang out in the stillness with a music which charmed Chrysander into forgetfulness of all the mystery which still hung about them.

At last she broke off suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, and rose. For an instant she stood looking down at him. The laughter had left her lips, her face was haggard and worn. In the shadow of her eyes burned once more that strange, sinister light.

“Where are you going?” Chrysander asked uneasily.

She laughed again—but with another kind of laughter.

“I am going on shore,” she answered very softly. “On the rocks, Paul.”

He rose and faced her, as though for a su-

preme struggle against her departure. And yet he knew that he was powerless.

"Do not go, Conca!"

"I am going—I can not stay. The sea and the night call me, as they used to do."

"Do not go!" he repeated stupidly.

"I must. And you promised to let me go. Do not try to keep me."

There was a veiled menace in her tone—her eyes were grey and terrible. Chrysander drew back with a gesture of despair.

The pale green figure stood for a moment motionless. Then it vanished, and Chrysander sat down by the piano and buried his face in his hands.

For a long time he did not move. Then, far off, and faint, he heard the sound of Conca's voice drifting across the quiet bay.

He rose, shivering with deadly cold, and went away to his cabin.

XXI

IT happened that night that Sarrasin d'Hérista was visiting Father Pasquiou in his little white *presbytère*. Father Pasquiou, like most old gentlemen who live in the more retired places of the earth, was a very decided chatterbox, and enjoyed the exercise of his own tongue with whole-hearted fervour. It escaped him that his guest was rather more grave and taciturn than

usual, and he talked contentedly until midnight in his entire and blissful ignorance of the flight of time. When at last the Dauphin roused himself from the reflections in which he had been plunged, quite lost to his pastor's eloquence, the old man accompanied him to the door, chattering still.

All at once, as they stood at the door, Sarra-sin started and stood palpably listening to some sound which the curé did not catch.

"What do you hear, Sarra-sin?" the old man asked, with the childish curiosity characteristic both of the very old and the very young, and not infrequently of the middle-aged as well.

Sarra-sin did not answer at once.

"I thought I heard some one call," he said, at last.

Father Pasquiou was a little deaf, and naturally did not like to think so.

"It must be your imagination. No one is about at this time of night. And, besides, I heard nothing."

Sarra-sin was listening still.

"There—did you not hear it then?" he said. "I am sure it was some one calling. I will go and see."

Father Pasquiou came out on to the garden path, neatly sanded, and shining like silver in the bright moonlight, and stood holding his white head on one side like an inquisitive pigeon.

"I am sure you are mistaken, my dear Sarra-

sin," he said with gentle decision. "There is really nothing. You had much better go home to bed."

Sarrasin smiled gravely.

"Do not let me keep you up. But I must certainly go and see."

M. le Curé closed the door behind him with a little resolute bang.

"If it is your business to go and see after my flock, it is certainly mine too," he said, laughing pleasantly. "Do not walk so fast, Sarrasin, I am not so young as I was twenty years ago."

The Dauphin did not appear to hear this statement of a very obvious fact. The two men went side by side down the garden path and out into the road. All was silent. The cool, scented air breathed pleasantly in their faces. A hedge of myrtle beside the road threw out its sweetness under the warm dew.

Father Pasquiou shrugged his lean shoulders under his shabby old *soutane*. He did not believe that Sarrasin had really heard anything at all, since he himself had heard nothing. He was also a little sleepy, and he thought that he would very probably catch a cold. He did not fear the cold, but he dreaded old Jeanne's indignation when he confessed its probable cause.

"My dear Sarrasin, there is nothing," he said once more, in a tone of mild expostulation.

The Dauphin did not reply. By this time they had reached the gate of the Villa Mimosa.

To their joint astonishment, a tall white figure was standing there.

"Is that you, M. d'Hérستا?" Madame de Maillane's voice said, with an accent of unmistakable relief. "Did you hear some one calling a moment ago? I was reading, upstairs, and I heard it, and came down to see what it was."

"M. le Dauphin imagined he heard something," Father Pasquiou said, laughing uneasily. "It seems that you imagined it too, madame."

"I imagined nothing. Some one certainly called out—I heard it distinctly," Clothilde answered. "The sound seemed to come from the rocks at the end of the garden. If you come in, we will go and see."

Father Pasquiou hesitated for a moment. He did not care for nocturnal adventures, and he would much have preferred to go home to bed. But Sarrasin d'Hérستا was standing gravely waiting for him to enter the garden, and the old priest's notions of propriety could not accept the idea of the Dauphin and Madame de Maillane engaged in a midnight excursion together in the forest in search of mysterious sounds, in the existence of which he was not inclined to believe. And it was quite clear that they both intended to go out upon the rocks. So he shrugged his shoulders once more and submitted to his fate.

"You will certainly catch cold, madame," he

said, a little testily, "and I am quite sure you will find nothing. But let us go and see—by all means."

Madame de Maillane led the way through the garden. She had thrown a white shawl over her head and shoulders, and her tall figure looked rather ghost-like in the moonlight, against the grey background of the mimosa-trees. Father Pasquiou trotted after her discontentedly, wondering when he should get back to the presbytery and his bed. The Dauphin d'Hérista brought up the rear of this procession, in a silence which was vaguely ominous.

They reached the rocks and Father Pasquiou halted, and regarded the rough ground with an almost comic expression of dismay upon his face, which neither Sarrasin nor Clothilde de Maillane were in the humour to see.

"There is nothing—nothing at all," he remarked, for about the sixth time that night. "My dear Sarrasin, you must admit that now."

The Dauphin admitted nothing, however. Clothilde had walked on a few yards across the rocks. Suddenly she stopped, and uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"M. de Hérista!"

Her cry for help was addressed, not to the priest, but to the Dauphin. In an instant Sarrasin was beside her, and she instinctively caught hold of his arm, as though for protection against her fear.

"There is a man in the water," she said quickly. "Look, against that rock!"

The Dauphin released himself almost roughly from her grasp; but he did not move from her side, as she had expected, to the rescue of the dark body half-floating in the water, half-lying upon the rock.

"Go back to the villa!" he said.

She drew back a step and looked at him. The tone of command stung her. The colour rose in her face, and her brown eyes flashed at him.

"I will do nothing of the kind," she said, in a tone as curt as his own. "You forget yourself, M. d'Hérista."

Sarrasin stood for a moment staring at her. Her anger, the fire in her eyes, seemed to paralyse him. Then, with a muttered exclamation, he sprang down upon the rocks below.

Clothilde stood breathless, watching him. She was very angry, and she felt that she was trembling—not with fear. And yet Sarrasin had not really done anything in the least rude. He had told her to go back to the villa, as any other man might have done in a like case without offending her at all. Yet now she was so angry that she was half inclined to take him at his word, go back to the villa, and have nothing to do with the whole affair.

Before she had time to do anything of the kind Sarrasin had waded through the shallow

water and reached the dark figure by the rock. She saw him bend down and drag it further out of the water; and then he lifted it upon his shoulders and came toward her again.

"Give me your hand," he said briefly.

She obeyed, in spite of her anger, and in another moment he was beside her on the upper rock. He laid his burden down gently enough at her feet.

"Do you know anything about these things?" he said, in the same crisp tone. "I am afraid there is nothing to be done for him."

Clothilde de Maillane was of too generous a nature to visit her own private humours on a third person, especially when that third person was manifestly badly in need of assistance. She knelt down by the limp figure, and lifted its head up on her knee. It was one of the workmen at the quarry, a young Italian, almost a boy, whom she had often noticed about the villa. He was apparently unconscious, and she saw that the Dauphin was right when he said that very little could be done for him.

"He could not possibly drown in barely a foot of water," she said, half answering Sarra-sin's remark, and half explaining the case to herself. "I do not believe he is dead, but I do not know what has happened to him. Ah—mon-sieur, what is this?"

For she had lifted the Italian's head, which had sunk upon his breast, and the action left his

bare throat clearly visible in the moonlight. The coarse blue shirt was open at the neck, and the flesh was torn and gashed across from shoulder to chin as though by the claws of some wild beast.

Clothilde felt frozen with horror; the Dauphin stood beside her, motionless and silent. Father Pasquiou, who had reached them by this time, uttered a shocked exclamation.

"He has been murdered," he said. "Sarrasin—madame—this is terrible! Madame, pray go in and call Vaillot. This is no sight for you."

Clothilde did not make any effort to move. On the contrary, she was still looking fixedly at the Dauphin.

"If he has been murdered," she said, in a low voice of extreme horror, "where is the knife? Or was it done with a knife?"

"Madame, madame, pray, pray go in!" the old priest cried distractedly. "Leave all that to the police, and go in!"

She did not appear to hear him.

"No knife would leave marks like that," she went on, still regarding Sarrasin with dilated eyes. "There is something strange here—something more than murder, M. d'Hérasta; you know what it is!"

Sarrasin started, and made a quick movement of protest.

"You know what it is!" she repeated fiercely. "I am sure you do. Why did you speak to me yesterday in the way you did about the devil?"

Why do the Italians talk about the devils of Hérستا? There is some mystery about it all—something too terrible and dreadful for any of us to imagine. And you know what it is!”

She broke off. Father Pasquiou was looking curiously at the Dauphin. His face was deadly white in the moonlight, and he seemed about to speak; but whether to admit Clothilde’s charge, or to deny it, the old curé was never to know.

For, suddenly, the limp figure lying against Clothilde’s knees quivered, writhed, as though in a last struggle for life. The fixed and senseless eyes grew bright, the pale lips unclosed as though for speech. With an almost superhuman effort the man raised himself into a sitting position and looked at the three people round him.

Once, twice, he tried to speak, but no words came. Only his face was eloquent of a horror before which the fear of death was as nothing; only in his strained and terrible eyes they read the shadow of a dread so great, that there was but one escape for the soul of him who had looked upon it.

For a moment he remained thus, as though trying to convey to them in that last look, the mystery of his fate. Then he fell back across Clothilde’s knees, with the same unutterable horror written in his dead eyes—the horror of that fear upon which he had looked last in life, and the sight of which had blinded him to all else for ever.

XXII

CLOTHILDE woke in the morning with the unpleasant sensation of having gone through all the phases of a particularly vivid and distressing nightmare. Had she not possessed naturally strong nerves, she would probably have paid very heavily for that adventure on the rocks. As it was, she felt stunned and bewildered. Her pity for the poor boy who had lost his life was almost obliterated by the horror of the mystery which surrounded the manner in which he had lost it.

For, that the mystery existed, none in his sober senses could deny. The Italian had been found lying in the water, yet not drowned; and the extraordinary cuts at his throat were not in themselves serious enough to cause death. As Clothilde reviewed the matter with the clearer judgment of reflection, she began to understand that the boy had not died from the effects of any physical injury. That, at any rate, seemed certain. The look of terror on his face put a much more sinister construction upon his death. The thing was a mystery it is true, yet it was a mystery that held a subtle suggestion of meaning. Even in her bewilderment Clothilde saw, or imagined that she saw, a distant solution of the puzzle, though it was a solution which mocked at her common sense.

Sarrasin d'Hérستا had spoken of the devil

that day in the boat, and Clothilde, like every one else in the neighbourhood, had heard of the devils of Hérista. That strange superstition of the Italians at the quarry was by no means new to her. Once or twice she had even set herself to discover upon what basis this modern myth rested, but the answers which her inquiries elicited were always vague, fragmentary, and inconclusive. One had seen a dark figure on the rocks which threw itself into the water and disappeared on being approached. Another, when fishing at night, had heard a strangely human cry far out at sea, or had caught the outline of a vague figure swimming after the boat. A third revived the old suspicion of the Dauphin d'Hérista—a suspicion based, perhaps, upon some otherwise forgotten incident of a far-off century—and held that there was certainly a devil hidden away in the grey old château.

But there were two incidents that recurred to Clothilde's memory with a special force gathered from the Italian's extraordinary fate. The first was the disappearance of Thérèse, Henriette Vaillot's sister, the story of which had been told her by Father Pasquiou. The second was a dim, almost confused recollection of a tale which had been one of the favourite horrors of her childhood.

Like most children, she had had a healthy appetite for ghost-stories and fairy tales. Her mother had come of a very old family of the

south who owned a large estate near Fréjus, and had brought with her, on her marriage, her old nurse, a woman of Hérستا, who became, in her turn, the nurse of the little Clothilde. Madame de Maillane remembered the quaint old woman well—her brown, wrinkled face, and her black eyes, her queer, drawling speech, and the habit she had of saying “maint *nang*” for “maintenant,” a habit which her small charge had essayed to copy, and for which she had met with a prompt rebuke. To this day the word always reminded Clothilde of the old woman who had been devoted to her.

She remembered, too, an occasion upon which she had probably been very naughty, and the old nurse’s threat that unless she repented she should be given to “the devils of Hérستا, who stole Henri.” Her interest had been excited at once, and she had never rested until she was told the story of Henri, whom the devils of Hérستا stole.

Briefly, the story was this. Henri was the usual naughty child of nursery fiction. He might have answered to the description of a demon of iniquity and an angel of loveliness. No creature in Hérستا was either so beautiful or so bad. And one day he too was threatened with the terrors of the devils of Hérستا.

But the devils of Hérستا did not impress Henri. He laughed in the faces of those who told him, said that no devils could or would hurt

him, and, laughing still, ran out of the house and down to the shore—to find these unseen powers with whom he had been threatened. It was late at the time, and the swift southern twilight was deepening into night. No one took much notice of the child's words, or noticed his absence, until the time came for him to be put to bed. Then it was discovered that he had never returned. Search was made. All that night men with lanterns in their hands went shouting through the woods and along the shore; but the boy was never found.

The event made a great stir in all the neighbourhood round. At first it was supposed that he had fallen into the water, and so met his death; but gradually, a kind of mystery grew about his disappearance. Fishermen, putting down their nets at night, swore that they had heard a child's voice crying and sobbing bitterly far out at sea, where no human being could be seen except themselves. Round this statement a legend grew. It was said that the child was not dead, but a prisoner to the "People of the Sea"; and for years the peasants of Hérستا awaited his return.

Time went on, and those who had known him grew old, and died, and their children had almost forgotten the story; and then, one day, the fishers found upon the rocks the dead body of an old man. He was almost naked, except for a matted seaweed, which hung round him in the fantastic

likeness of a dress; and no one had ever seen his face before.

They buried him at Saint Raphaël, in a nameless grave, and this incident also was forgotten, until one of the fishermen who had found him was dying and sent for the priest and confessed to him—and to his family—that he had found on the body of the unknown man a little gold chain, which he had dishonestly kept.

The priest happened to have been a great friend of his predecessor, the former curé of Hérista, and had heard from him the strange story of Henri's disappearance; and he had also heard that the child, when lost, had about his neck a little gold chain of exactly the size and pattern as that found upon the body of the unknown man.

This was the story that the event of the night before brought most vividly before Clothilde's memory. There was in it the same strange suggestion of mystery, the same query, to which no answer could be made; yet to which, she felt, an answer must exist—somewhere. Perhaps in the Château d'Hérista—perhaps on the rocks—perhaps in the depths of the blue water, among the "People of the Sea."

She laughed at the idea, and yet it held her. After all, there was magic in the air. A supernatural explanation of all these mysteries did not seem so very out of place—in Hérista. The Dauphin did not seem to be a person to believe

any idle tales, and a sudden instinct had prompted her to the conclusion that he knew more about the Italian's death than any one else, as she had not scrupled to tell him. He knew; he had known when he spoke of the devil in the flying boat; he had known always—she was sure of that. And she would make him tell her.

She did not ask herself by what means she would do this, perhaps because she recognised that they were means which, strictly speaking, were not altogether fair, since she guessed that Fate had placed him at a disadvantage when fighting against her. It was absurd—ridiculous. The man was nothing more than a peasant, a common fisher. And yet—and yet—he wrote himself Sarrasin d'Hérista. Even the Duchesse de Maillane must pay homage to that name.

Also—and this was, perhaps, even more important—she meant to solve the mystery.

XXIII

SHE was to have an early opportunity for her attempt to do so, for she had hardly been downstairs an hour before Madame Vaillot announced the Dauphin. She was a little astonished—a little shaken from her determination. She had not meant the struggle—it would be one, she knew—to begin so soon.

Sarrasin was grave, calm, almost imperturba-

ble. Yet he had the air of a man who had slept badly, if at all. His face was pale, his eyes were faintly troubled.

He did not offer either an explanation of his call, or an apology for the rather unusual hour at which he had chosen to make it. He had the appearance of having come for a purpose, though he did not approach the purpose at once. He inquired politely after her health, and expressed the hope that she had felt no ill effects from the adventure of the night before. She thought that he did not seem overjoyed by her negative reply.

"You should not have stayed," he said, almost severely. "You should have gone in, when I told you to go."

Clothilde smiled suddenly.

"You should not have told me to go," she said. "I was very angry."

"That is why I did tell you. I knew you would be angry. I hoped you would be so angry that you would go in."

Clothilde was half inclined to be angry again.

"You hoped—I see. Well, you did not succeed, though I was really very angry, too. And I was very rude to you. I hope you heard what I said?"

"Yes, I heard. But you were quite right. I had no business to tell you to go away; and you had no business to be there."

"Then we were both right—or wrong. We *had* better forgive each other. And I did no

good. That poor boy! It is a terrible affair, M. d'Hérista."

"Yes," Sarrasin assented meditatively. He did not seem to be thinking of the affair, but of something else. "Yes," he said again, suddenly; "it was terrible—all these things are terrible. You ought not to see them—to be near them. The most terrible thing of all is that you are."

"It does not hurt me. Of course I am very, very sorry for the Italian; but——" she paused for an effort. "Will you think me very unfeeling if I say that it interests me, too?"

"That is because you do not understand it."

"No doubt. I am glad you came this morning, because you can help me to understand it."

Sarrasin looked at her for a moment without speaking.

"I am sorry," he said at last, "but I do not think I can."

"You must."

"Why? It is not necessary. Some things are better left unknown, unexplained."

"But you must explain this," Clothilde said earnestly. "I am sure that you can. If I ask you"—her voice softened a little—"I am sure that you will."

"I ask you to believe, madame, that I would do much, if you wished—very much," Sarrasin answered, in his quiet, simple way.

"But not this," she said quickly.

"No—not this."

His tone was quiet, direct. She felt that she had almost failed. Perhaps she felt that she had even quite failed; but she would not admit the possibility of such failure.

"And yet you know what it all means? You have never denied that you know."

"I know what some of it means. I think I know what the rest of it means. I am afraid so," he added, in a grave tone.

"And it is very bad?"

"Yes—it is very bad—so bad that I do not want you to know. So bad"—he spoke with a palpable effort—"that I came here this morning to warn you—to ask you to leave Hérستا at once."

"To leave Hérستا—at once!" she repeated incredulously.

"Yes."

She waited for a moment. Decidedly she had failed. He did not mean to tell her—and what he did not mean to do, he would not do. She felt that she was growing angry again, or else—her sensations were too complex for description. But she was either very angry, or she admired the Dauphin's resolution as she had admired few things in her life.

"Yes—you expect me to go?" she said presently.

"If you are wise you will go."

"You wish me to go?" she asked, with a little burst of reckless cruelty.

He did not notice the thrust: but he did not look at her as he answered.

"I ought to wish it, I suppose, since it is for your good."

His tone was untouched by any shade of compliment, but Clothilde was not disposed to have mercy.

"That is no answer. Do you wish me to go, M. d'Hérista?"

She had pressed the point too far—pressed it without the least conception of its import to him, and with a mere thoughtless desire to revenge herself for his refusal to gratify her curiosity. His eyes met hers suddenly, and the sadness in them hurt her.

"No, I do not wish it," he said quite simply.

Clothilde turned away rather quickly, and rearranged a vase filled with mimosa on the table beside her. She did not quite understand what he had said, but his meaning was too obvious to be mistaken; and she was at once very sorry, and a little afraid. Presently she turned again to him and spoke.

"I will not go," she said, in a final tone.

Sarrasin rose to his feet, calm, and grave as ever, and still persistent, even in his defeat.

"Once more, madame," he said, "I ask you to go—for your son's sake."

Clothilde had risen too: she stood before him with a look which was beginning to be defiant. Yet she smiled as she answered:

"Do you think I am a coward, M. d'Hérista? I will not go—even for Bob. I am not afraid of your devils and your mysteries. Let them do their worst!"

Sarrasin's face changed perceptibly.

"You do not know what you are saying. Madame, I entreat you, for the last time."

She checked him with a decision as great as his own.

"For the last time—I will not go! And I will find out, M. d'Hérista, even though you do not choose to tell me." She laughed rather angrily. "This is a declaration of war, I suppose, is it not? You will not tell me. Very well—but I mean to know. It shall be a duel between us. You are determined to keep me in the dark, and I am determined to see. I am very obstinate when I like. I will unravel this mystery yet."

He bent his head. There was a curious light in his eyes. Was he also a little defiant?

"Is it a challenge, madame?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then I accept it."

XXIV

THE news of the Italian's mysterious death reached Chrysander very early that morning. All Hérista was in a state of excitement, and one of the men on the yacht collected the details of

the story with surprising rapidity. When Chrysander went on deck, he was struck by the atmosphere of mystery which enshrouded his usually cheerful and light-hearted crew. It was so patent, not to say melodramatic, that he at once asked the question necessary to loosen their tongues.

“What has happened?”

They poured out the story to him with much tragic gesture and many harrowing flights of imagination. The Italian had been torn to pieces—almost. The Dauphin d’Hérستا had rescued his body at the risk of his life, and only succeeded in doing so at all because M. le Curé was there, and assisted him, no doubt, with a few prayers. Chrysander’s belief in the efficacy of prayer was not quite so strong as theirs seemed to be, and he listened in considerable bewilderment.

“But what killed the man?”

There was a silence. The sailors looked meaningly at each other. Oh, m’sieu’ had not heard, of course. Or, perhaps——? Well, it was common talk that the Italian had fallen a victim to the devils of Hérستا.

Chrysander asked no more questions. The mention of the devils of Hérستا was enough for him. For a miserable half-hour he remained on deck, looking out at the celestial sapphire of the sea. Then he went below and found Conca.

She was rather paler than usual, and he fancied there was a furtive expression in her eyes

when they fell upon him. He met her just coming out of her cabin, and for an instant he hesitated what to do. Then he opened the cabin door, which she had shut.

"I wish to speak to you, Conca. Will you come in here for a moment?"

She went back silently. He followed her, shut the door, and stood with his back toward it looking at her. There was no mistake now. Her eyes were wide, and distinctly troubled: her pale face struck him with a sudden fear. She glanced from his face to the door, as though looking for a chance to escape.

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

She lifted her hand to her head with a gesture of distress.

"I do not know. I have had terrible dreams all night. My head aches fearfully—I suppose it was dreaming like that."

Chrysander looked at her curiously.

"What did you dream about?"

She shuddered a little and turned away.

"I can not tell you. But it was terrible, whatever it was."

Chrysander was turning an idea to and fro in his mind. He did not speak at once.

"Do you often have dreams of that kind?"

"No. I remember having a dream something like this some years ago, before you came to Hérasta. Please do not ask me any more. I do not want to think about it."

"While you were dreaming of terrible things," Chrysander said quietly, "terrible things were happening very near you."

She looked up quickly.

"Terrible things? Do not frighten me like that, Paul! What has happened?"

"An Italian was murdered on the rocks last night."

She grew very white. Her usual pallor became almost ghastly, and her eyes were fixed upon him with a look of genuine horror.

"Ah—no—no—not murdered?"

There was a gasping sob in her voice which startled him.

"Unfortunately, there is no mistake. The Dauphin and Father Pasquiou found him. He was lying partly in the water by the rocks near the villa, and his throat was torn as though——"

He got no further. With a cry that ran through the yacht Conca staggered forward, and fell in a confusion of pale, gleaming draperies at his feet.

XXV

CHRYSANDER endured a good deal of remorse that day. For the first time since he had known her, Conca was absolutely unnerved. Her horror was so genuine that she seemed to become startlingly human. She was like a frightened child, like anything, in short, but her usually cold

and mysterious self. She clung to him with an almost pathetic terror; she would not let him leave her for a moment. All the long, bright day he sat beside her, looking with puzzled eyes upon the strange spectacle of her distress.

What was the meaning of it? Was it simply terror at the fate of the Italian? Or, had she too some strange knowledge of the devils of Hérista, as the Dauphin undoubtedly had? He did not know, but he began to understand the fear of this vague, supernatural element in the little blue bay which possessed so many people in Hérista, and at which he himself had been inclined to laugh in the days that now seemed so long ago. He remembered Madame Vaillot's frightened face, the Dauphin's reluctant hints; and the devils of Hérista grew very real to him.

Over again the presence of this fear approached him; but in the brilliant sunshine of the southern day it was possible to resist its power. He fought it, and kept it at bay by sheer force of will, and nothing else. But in his own mind he realised that his powers of resistance had their limits. He might be able to make a struggle now, but it would not be for long. This terror was a satellite of the night, an ally of the haunted dark. When the sun dropped into the western sea, it would fall upon him with redoubled strength.

With this thought in his mind he watched the

daylight fade. Darkness came quickly in Hérista. The shadow of the hills, beyond which a gorgeous sunset flared over Saint Raphaël, fell early upon the blue Rade. It was a shadow, cold and sinister, and with it came the damp chill of the forests, a breath of icy winter after the tropical summer of the day. Above the dark hills a pink glow sank quietly from the sky, and the pine-trees blackened under the changing light. The rich, monotonous colouring of the sea became a steely blue, cold, repellant, mysterious. This difference between night and day was like a mask placed suddenly upon a beautiful face. The deep green hills, the glowing sea, became suddenly rigid and lifeless. A grey twilight washed out the glory of the day, and gave place, in its turn, to a darkness as yet without moon or stars. The world grew suddenly empty of all save the low, sibillant whisper of the sea.

As the dusk grew, Conca became more silent, more composed. A faint light from the port-holes was the only illumination of the cabin, and Chrysander could barely see the gleam of her hair upon the pillows as he sat beside her. He became aware of the silence which had fallen upon her, and it affected him unpleasantly. Presently he heard her voice speaking to him out of the darkness, with an accent of complete self-possession.

“ I am better now, Paul. Are you not tired of sitting there? ”

"Do you wish me to go away? I thought you wanted me to stay with you."

She laughed softly. Her laughter had a touch of self-consciousness—perhaps of shame.

"So I did. But I am better, as I tell you. Perhaps if you go, I shall be able to get a little sleep. I am very tired. Do not let any one disturb me again to-night."

"But it is quite early."

"I am tired," she said again, rather petulantly.

Chrysander sat silent for a moment. Some instinct within him urged him not to go—not to leave her.

"Well, are you not going?"

She turned toward him, and he felt, in the dusk, that she was looking at him, though he could not see her face. The idea of this unseen scrutiny made him a little uneasy. It was difficult, also, to remain where he was so clearly unwelcome. He rose and stood looking at the darkness where she lay.

"Very well, I will go. Try to go to sleep; and do not dream those terrible dreams again."

He heard her catch her breath quickly before she answered.

"I shall not dream—to-night." Her voice sounded hard, almost ominous, in the gloom. "No—I shall not dream," she repeated, as though to herself.

"I hope not. Good-night!"

She laughed again—suddenly—and without any apparent reason.

“Good-night.”

The words had an accent of irony, of mockery almost, which Chrysander failed to understand. He left her, and went to his music-room to write. He dined in solitude, and returned to the music-room. He knew better than to disturb Conca when she had given out that she did not wish to be disturbed.

He wrote for a couple of hours, though his thoughts were certainly not with his work. The thought of the murdered Italian came between him and the music-paper. The mystery of Hérista seemed to hang above him like a cloud in the still, blue night.

Presently he laid down his pen. He was very tired, and the little dots on the ruled lines were beginning to dance before his eyes. He had just decided to put away his work and go to bed, when a slight sound arrested his attention.

It was very slight; if he had been writing he would not have noticed it. The water was lapping softly against the white sides of the yacht, and this sound was hardly more definite than that. And yet it was different; it was the sound of movement not made by the sea. There was a faint splash, the churning noise of water turned to and fro.

Chrysander rose, and went to the nearest port-hole which stood open.

The night was blue, and soft with moonlight. The land seemed bathed in a broad flood of misty radiance, through which the windows of the Villa Mimosa burned red. The sea was veiled with a light, fine mist, exquisitely faint and delicate, which gave to the shining water the effect of jewels half-hidden by a film of gossamer. Here and there the moonlight struck through this aërial dimness with a gleam of clear, bluish fire, moving mysteriously before the eye.

The water was so still, so transparent, that Chrysander, looking down from the open port-hole, could see the dark, fan-like movement of the seaweed, swayed to and fro by gentle currents across the sandy bottom of the bay. He could even catch the silver flight of a fish along the purple avenues of this miniature ocean forest.

Presently, as he looked, the water began to lose its transparent stillness. It became ruffled, and a sandy cloud seemed to drift between him and the seaweed. It grew denser still, until it took almost the shape of something floating a foot or two below the surface of the sea.

Chrysander watched, interested by this curious disturbance of the quiet water. The sandy cloud began to disperse, to melt away; but the strange shape it had taken did not melt with it, but remained, faint, elusive, veiled here and there by seaweed, indefinite, yet suggestive. Now it seemed like a figure imagined in a dream, now it grew clearer—but never clear enough to

determine its exact character. The troubled water, the disturbed sand, the waving masses of seaweed, seemed linked together in an unconscious conspiracy of concealment. It was impossible to see precisely what was there; it was equally impossible not to realise that there was really something to be seen which yet steadily eluded the eye. The shape wavered to and fro between the surface and the white sand. Now it seemed floating away: now it almost vanished: now it grew so still that the movement of the water hardly stirred it.

Chrysander's curiosity was thoroughly aroused. He leaned a little forward, and in doing so forgot the cigarette which he had been smoking when he came to the port-hole, and which he still held between his fingers. It slipped from his hand and fell into the water with a little hiss, for it was still alight when it fell.

In a moment the water was violently convulsed. The fall of the cigarette had startled this creature floating below. It emerged for a second from its vagueness, its outline grew clearer though still hardly distinct.

And then, through the quivering water, Chrysander saw a sight which paralysed him. A face was looking up at him—a face, pale, misty, almost spectral, yet, in a way, distinct, for he could see that it belonged to a living thing, which would have seemed human but for the strange fire in its eyes, the strange expression of its fea-

tures. It was a human face, stamped with the cruel watchfulness of a wild beast stalking its prey. It was hungry, with a passionate, animal hunger, which was unspeakably dreadful when seen on features apparently human. It was savage with the desire to eat, and evil with the desire to slay.

It remained only an instant and then was gone suddenly—with a flash of ruffled silver in the water, and a stormy stirring of the tangled forests of the sea. The cloud of sand raised by its exit subsided quietly, the water grew smooth and still. The seaweeds swayed with a slow, monotonous movement to the gentle motion of the wave.

The face had vanished, but it had left behind it a sinister shadow in Chrysander's mind. It seemed almost to have chilled the soft, pine-scented air, and darkened the faintly luminous scintillation of the sleeping sea.

XXVI

CLOTHILDE had other matters besides the death of the Italian to occupy her attention that week. The next day's post brought her a letter, delivered in person with much ceremony by the *facteur* himself, who considered it part of his business to inquire affectionately and respectfully *after* the health of madame and M'sieu' Bob, and

report in detail upon the possibilities of the weather. Clothilde's answers were a little abstracted, and Jean decided that she was suffering from the effect of the adventure of the night before last.

In reality, the sight of the handwriting on the letter he had brought had struck Clothilde with something like panic. The letter bore the Nice postmark, and was addressed in her brother's hand. From the postmark she concluded that this relative of hers was meditating what, in the circumstances, might be designated an attack in force—a conclusion which was unfortunately by no means mistaken.

Robert de Castres had always been one of those worthy, but rather tiresome, people, who know how to manage other person's affairs much better than they know how to do it for themselves. He very seldom took his own advice, or followed the excellent precepts which he held up to all his friends; but he was always so sincerely convinced that the example which he would be the last man in the world to set, would bring entire happiness to any one who followed it, that it would have seemed more than unkind to criticise him. Clothilde's life had been largely composed of periods of submission to, and revolt from, the rule of this family autocrat. She had been left in his guardianship when hardly more than a child, and he had set himself, with a touching faith in his own capacities for arranging other

people's affairs, to regulate her existence on the best possible model.

To do him justice, he was sincerely fond of his sister; but his affection had not prevented him from causing her great unhappiness, with the most unimpeachable motives in the world. He would have ruined himself cheerfully for her sake, but it is quite probable that he would have done so, not to bring her any real benefit, but to achieve something particularly inconvenient and distasteful to her, which he was certain was for her good. Clothilde was almost helpless before his affectionate blunders, because she at once realised how utterly mistaken he was, and how sincere was the feeling which prompted his mistakes.

All through her life she had been subjected to this fatal influence of his desire to manage her business instead of his own. Perhaps the greatest of his mistakes was her marriage. Yet, in that, as in every other of his blunders, he had acted admirably, and with every sort of prudence and foresight. He had chosen for her a man who possessed very many good qualities—as even Clothilde admitted. He was young, clever, good-natured, good-looking, and, which did not escape this model brother, immensely rich.

In justice to Robert de Castres it is but fair to add, that he would not have married his sister to a man likely to make her unhappy, for any amount of money. He chose a husband for her

with as much care and caution as he would have chosen a horse for himself, or even more, which is saying a good deal. It was not his fault that Louis de Maillane always remained absolutely indifferent to his beautiful wife, or that Clothilde could never manage to feel the slightest affection for a man whom every other woman of his acquaintance found charming.

Poor Robert always regarded the nonsuccess of the marriage which he had made, with a bewilderment at once pathetic and laughable. He had done his part in it with such entire good faith—why in the world could not Clothilde and Louis behave sensibly? There was every reason why they should get on together; and he was lost in wonder and despair to find they did not get on at all.

At last he was obliged to confess to himself—in strict privacy—that in this case he had really, for once, made a mistake; but he never understood why. It did not occur to him to consider the inconsistencies of human nature. He never realised that the fault lay neither in Clothilde nor her husband, who were both very charming people in their way, and would have probably liked each other very much—apart. When his sister, in a moment of extreme exasperation, advanced the theory that she might have been quite happy with a much worse man than Louis de Maillane, providing that she had cared for him, and he for her, he simply lifted his hands in mute protest.

against the unreasonableness and ingratitude of women, and fled from her presence in genuine despair.

Unfortunately for Clothilde, instead of taking warning by his mistake in this case and leaving her alone, the excellent but mistaken Robert felt it all the more incumbent on him to charge himself with her welfare in the future, because he had been unlucky enough to bungle it so seriously in the past. He therefore proceeded to exercise over her doings an affectionate and sympathetic surveillance which drove her almost to desperation. Not content with advising Louis into unfortunate financial speculations, he set himself as a kind of social watch-dog at his sister's gate. He felt it his duty to warn her of all the men who might be going to fall in love with her, with disastrous consequences to her and themselves, and to criticise the exact amount of favour she did or did not show to any of them. This, to any other woman, would have been intolerable, but Clothilde was very tender of her brother's eccentricities, and could not fail to see the comic side of his new *rôle*. It was the easier to laugh, because she found that people had a habit of falling in love with her, which became tiresome, and which she did not at all enjoy. If she had cared for any of the luckless adorers whom Robert chased from her it might have been a different story—as indeed, it very nearly became in the case of Paul Chrysander.

For Paul Chrysander was a case apart. She had a very real regard for him which, at one time, came very near to developing into something else. The danger which Robert was always anticipating was not far from her in the last days of her friendship with Chrysander. She was very unhappy, and in the humour to do desperate things. Here again Robert stepped in, very nearly with most disastrous results. He did not approve of her liking for Chrysander, and she had one of her rare quarrels with him. Chrysander, at any rate, she did not intend to give up in deference to any of Robert's well-meant fads.

She was unhappy, she was desperate, she was almost, if not quite, in love with Chrysander. If he had guessed it, perhaps Robert de Castres would have had reason for his fears. But he did not guess, and wrote to her about Conca's marriage with Jean Méral.

The effects of that letter have been already stated. Perhaps luckily for Clothilde, Robert's talent for interference took another form just then. Little Bob was ill, and his excellent uncle experimented upon him, unknown to his mother, with some novel remedy of his own which nearly succeeded in curing the child completely, inso-much as it nearly despatched him from a world in which any cure was necessary. Clothilde was so furious when she learned the truth, that Chrysander and all other things became indifferent to her for the time being. She succeeded in

dealing poor Robert's irrepressible optimism a blow from which it never entirely recovered—at least, in the same degree as of old. It would have required a miracle to cure him for ever of meddling with other people's concerns.

That no miracle of this kind had taken place, Clothilde had now ample proof. For Robert was meddling again—with the purest motives in the world, and the most plausible of reasons. He had been mainly responsible for the unhappiness of her first marriage; he confessed that fact with a disarming frankness, a delicious air of magnanimous self-accusation. Well, he would make amends. In fact, he asked nothing better than to be allowed to make amends. His only desire was, to see her happy, and after mature consideration——

The phrase struck a note of most unpleasant recollection. Robert always made his biggest blunders "on mature consideration"; she had noticed that before.

To be brief, he proposed to atone for the failure of her first essay in matrimony by arranging a second.

Clothilde had expected this proposal, and feared it, for some time. She knew that Robert was not easily restrained from doing what he considered kindnesses. This was a sort of kindness that appealed most powerfully to him. The prospective husband, whose claims he had set himself to urge, was his own greatest friend.

He felt that it was a most eminently suitable arrangement. It would give him the greatest pleasure—and he was sure everybody would be equally delighted. And dear Clothilde must know that De Fleury was absolutely devoted to her.

Clothilde had known it for some time, of course. De Fleury had not left much doubt of his intentions in her mind, and she had expended much feminine ingenuity in preventing him from asking her to marry him. He would succeed in doing so, one day, no doubt, but meanwhile she did not want to be called upon to make any decision. Robert was always worrying her to marry some one, and if the worst came to the worst—with Robert in one's family, the worst, she felt, was really rather more than a figure of speech—she would sooner marry De Fleury than most other men she knew. This was not saying much, perhaps, but then, she had a distinct disinclination toward marrying any one. She liked De Fleury. More than that she would not or could not say.

And here was Robert at Nice, with De Fleury under his protection, so to speak, and only waiting her permission to come over to lunch. To lunch! Clothilde could not help laughing. It was so like Robert's diplomacy to propose a lunch for the purpose of bringing about a marriage.

But it was a stroke more masterly than was

usual, even with Robert de Castres, to mention in a postscript that Bob was really growing too big to be managed by a woman. If she did not put him under some authority he would grow up a—— Robert's well-turned eloquence failed him before the horrid spectacle of Bob's future depravity.

Clothilde laughed again. It was not easy to fancy Bob as a monster of precocious iniquity. Yet the suggestion hurt her a little. Bob was occasionally difficult to manage, and his mother knew it. Perhaps, after all, it would be her duty some day to give Bob a master—to put him under the authority of a man who knew how to manage him better than she, his mother, did.

She sat for a long time with the letter in her hand, looking at the sea. Then she went indoors and wrote to her brother. Her first impulse had been, to give a flat refusal to his scheme, but she did not act on it. She contented herself with saying that under no possible circumstances, at present, could she receive M. de Fleury. Robert might give out that she was ill, or anything convenient. And she would be delighted to see him to lunch next day, if he cared to come to Hérستا alone.

She had hardly signed her name at the bottom of the sheet of paper before Bob ran breathlessly into the room.

"Oh, maman, M. le Dauphin is going out in the boat this afternoon. May I go too?"

She sighed as she folded her note. Again she felt vaguely jealous of Sarrasin d'Hérista, and his influence over the boy. Bob seemed to take very kindly to an authority other than her own.

"Are you going to say yes, maman?"

Bob's voice was very coaxing, and he rubbed softly against her shoulder as he spoke. She put her arm round him with a gesture half-caressing, half-angry.

"Oh, Bob, it is always this Dauphin! You are never content unless you are with him. I suppose it is really true, you are growing too big to care for me."

The tears were in her eyes, childish as she knew it was to cry over Sarrasin's fascination for the boy; but she was worried, and Robert's letter was beginning to do its work. She kissed Bob with quivering lips, and in another second he had flung his arms round her neck.

"I am not too big to care for you," he cried indignantly. "I care for you more than anything. And—and I won't go with the Dauphin, if it makes you look like that."

His childish indignation was very sweet to Clothilde. She began to laugh at herself before her eyes were dry.

"There—there—I am very silly, dear Bob. Go and enjoy yourself. I do not want to tie you to the leg of my chair all your life."

"I do not want to go," Bob said stoutly.

"But you must go, to please me. You see, I am not crying now. I was not crying about you, exactly; I have just had a letter——"

"From Uncle Robert?" Bob interrupted with promptitude.

"Yes. You queer child, how did you know?"

Bob reflected, with his head on one side, like an inquisitive sparrow.

"Uncle Robert generally makes you miserable," he said at last. "I suppose he wants you to do something you don't want to do. He is always doing that. Last time he wanted you to marry that horrible man who said 'S-sh' at me when I was playing Napoleon at the battle of Austerlitz, and the big guns brought the table over. As if one could tell what heavy guns would do! I did not mean it—and you didn't mind it a bit. What business had he to say 'S-sh' to me, I should like to know?"

Clothilde was looking at him curiously.

"Who told you Uncle Robert wanted me to marry him, Bob?"

"Oh, I don't remember—some one. But I knew you would not, for he was quite horrid," Bob said, in a casual tone of dismissal. "You wouldn't let any one say 'S-sh' to me, would you?"

Clothilde smoothed his hair gently. Her conscience was not quite clear on this point.

"Well, dear, some one might have to say it to you some time. I am afraid I let you have

your own way too much. And now, run away, and play, and tell the Dauphin you will go with him."

Bob lingered for a few minutes. Then he rubbed her arm again, with a pretty air of supplication.

"Maman!" he said, in a very small voice.

"You little nuisance, are you turning into a cat? I shall knock the inkstand over in a minute. What do you want?"

"Maman, will you come too?"

Clothilde put the inkstand into a place of safety, and looked at him keenly.

"Did M. d'Hérista tell you to ask me?"

"No, maman"—Bob was a very truthful child—"he didn't tell me—exactly," he hesitated. "I said, I wished you would come; and he said he wished it too. And—and—I am sure he did wish it, very much," Bob added persuasively.

Clothilde sat looking at him with the letter in her hand.

"He would be *very* pleased," Bob said, with a wistful glance at her face.

Clothilde stamped the letter and rose to her feet.

"Give my compliments to M. le Dauphin, Bob," she said, "and tell him that I have a headache, and should very much like a sail this afternoon, if he will take me."

Bob executed an original, if not particularly elegant, *pas seul* of delight. It was not often

that he so forgot his dignity, and Clothilde laughed as she chased him out of the room, and across the terrace.

When he had vanished under the mimosa-trees, she stood still in the sunlight, and laughed once more.

"Poor, dear Robert," she said to herself, "how dreadfully shocked he would be!"

XXVII

TEN minutes later little Bob was sitting on the rocks beside Sarrasin d'Hérستا, repeating his mother's message with a delightful touch of ceremony. Bob could, on occasion, be very formal indeed.

"I told her you wished her to come," he added, by way of footnote to the text of Clothilde's speech, "and of course she said she would come—at once."

Sarrasin's eyebrows rose a little under the shadow of his vast straw hat.

"At once?" he queried.

"Yes. I did not think she would come, and so I said you wanted her, too. It was quite true?" Bob asked, with sudden anxiety.

Sarrasin looked away from the small eager face to the sea that lay before them, shimmering like a great, blue jewel of many facets in the glory of the noonday sun.

"Yes, it was certainly quite true," he answered gravely.

His tone puzzled Bob; he was not quite sure whether the Dauphin was pleased or not. Certainly his tall friend was not in the habit of performing a war dance in moments of satisfaction, but his manner of receiving the intimation of Madame de Maillane's consent was a little too solemn for Bob's taste.

He edged a little nearer to the blue figure on the rock.

"You are quite sure you want her?" he inquired.

Sarrasin started, and then laughed. He had not been thinking of Bob these last few moments.

"Yes—I am quite sure—of course I do," he said, with a heartiness which even Bob found reassuring. "Did you suppose I objected, Bob?"

Bob shook his head until his straw hat flapped down over his eyes.

"No; but you see, you haven't any ladies at the château. Of course there is old Marthe," he added politely, "but she is rather old, isn't she? And I thought perhaps you didn't like them."

"I have not had much chance of liking them," Sarrasin answered rather sadly.

"Well, you can like maman," Bob said in a tone of consolation. "You do, don't you?"

Sarrasin was looking at the sea again. Bob imagined his question unheard, and repeated it.

"You do like maman, don't you, M. le Dauphin?"

"Yes—I like her."

The French language is astonishingly defective in one instance at least. The unlucky verb *aimer* has to bear the burden of two separate meanings on its two syllables. Therefore Sarrasin, outwardly using the word in its cooler sense, avoided Bob's eyes, with a sudden consciousness of saying it with an inner meaning remote from his companion's intention.

"You say it rather queerly," Bob remarked, in a tone of impersonal criticism. "I don't believe you like her at all."

Sarrasin smiled. The situation struck him as rather quaint.

"You are quite wrong, Bob. I am delighted that madame your mother is coming."

Bob sat in silence for a moment. He was a discreet little boy, and he was wondering whether it was advisable to touch upon a purely domestic matter in conversation with the Dauphin.

"You know Uncle Robert has been worrying maman again," he said finally, in a confidential tone.

"Worrying her?"

"Well, he has been writing to her—and she cried. She would not cry about nothing. I sup-

pose he wants her to marry some one," Bob added disgustedly.

Sarrasin moved quickly in his place on the rock.

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Uncle Robert always worries her. He wanted her to marry somebody before. I remember, she cried then. I hate Uncle Robert," Bob added. "If he comes here I shall put some spiders in his pocket."

"You must not do that," Sarrasin said mechanically.

Bob looked disappointed.

"Not some very little ones, M. le Dauphin?"

"No."

Bob sighed, but submitted to his idol's decision.

"Very well; if you say so—M. le Dauphin. Maman is jealous of you," he added suddenly.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"She does not like it because I like you. She seems to think that I like you better than her."

"That is absurd. You should tell her so."

"I did. But I don't think she believed it. She is—funny—about you," Bob remarked, in a tone of profound reflection. "And I do like you very much," he added, with fervour.

Sarrasin smiled pleasantly. He was very fond of this child. Bob's devotion was by no means unreturned, though the object of it was not *demonstrative* by nature.

For once he departed from his usual rather stately and unapproachable demeanour, sufficiently to pat the boy's shoulder kindly with his strong brown hand.

"We are very good friends, I hope, Bob. But you must not let madame your mother think that you neglect her for me. Perhaps you have been too much with me—I do not know. I have been only too glad to have you, and I did not think she would mind."

Bob gazed at him with a countenance of owlish solemnity.

"I do not think she does mind, exactly. But she is—funny," he said in conclusion.

Nevertheless, his words rankled in Sarrasin's mind. It hurt him to think that Madame de Maillane objected to Bob's taste for his society. There was a shade more gravity than usual in his manner as he helped her into the boat that afternoon.

She, on the contrary, was smiling with entire gaiety. She carried a basket on her arm, and Bob staggered behind her under the weight of another, of a size oddly disproportionate to his own.

"See what Bob has beguiled me into, M. d'Hérista," she said, laughing. "The little wretch is wild to have a picnic on the rocks, so I thought we would have our sail first, and then land somewhere and make tea. I have a spirit-lamp, and a teapot, and all the luxuries of civili-

sation. I dare say the sugar and the methylated spirit will all be mixed up by the time we land, but no doubt that will only add to the charms of the affair—in Bob's eyes."

"Not in yours, madame?"

"I prefer less original flavouring to my tea. But it is all right so long as Bob enjoys himself."

She settled herself comfortably in the boat with Bob at her side. The orange sail swung over to the wind, and the light vessel danced away over the diamond-sprinkled sea. A white whip of spray lashed across Clothilde's cheek, and she laughed.

"It is rough enough to-day, M. d'Hérista. There is more of a sea than I thought."

Sarrasin glanced at the sky.

"The wind is going down, madame."

"Do you always know what the wind is going to do, M. d'Hérista?" she asked innocently. "Suppose it should get stronger, instead?"

Sarrasin smiled gravely as he looked down at her.

"Then there would be a gale, madame, and we should have to put in at L'Orayas and walk home, for we could not get back by sea. But I do not think it is going to blow."

Clothilde, as a matter of fact, cared very little for the wind or the sea. She was in rather a desperate mood, and inclined to snatch at the amusement of the moment and let the future

take care of itself. To-morrow, she knew perfectly well, would bring her well-meaning brother, with his thousand-and-one excellent reasons why she should do everything in the world that was most distasteful to her. She was determined to enjoy the few hours of freedom to the uttermost, and the movement of the water, the sparkling rush of air in her face, produced upon her senses an effect of delicious intoxication. She told herself that she was perhaps a little mad, and would probably regret her madness to-morrow. Meanwhile, to-morrow seemed very far off, and she intended to enjoy herself.

The boat skimmed the water like a bird, racing before the wind. The blue water broke against the bows in a stringing cloud of foam, and the strong, bright air sang in the orange sail. Bob clung respectively to the basket containing the teapot and to his mother's skirts. Clothilde laughed at every fresh lurch of the boat, though it was not very easy to speak. She felt like a child playing truant; she forgot all her perplexities in the excitement of the moment.

The dark pine-woods flew past. Little blue bays appeared and vanished again behind red and green headlands. Cap Roux was already behind them, a rude pillar of sandstone against the brilliant sky. Bob, clinging desperately to his basket, nodded toward the shore.

"There is L'Orayas!" he panted.

Sarrasin turned the boat toward the mouth of a little blue bay, fringed with high rocks and twisted pines.

"We will not go quite as far as L'Orayas," he said. "We can land here, and madame can make tea."

XXVIII

IN after years Clothilde was heard to declare that the most charming entertainment in which she ever took part was an impromptu tea-party on the rocks below L'Orayas, at which the sugar tasted of methylated spirit, and the milk had a delicate flavour of the tinned sardines which Bob had insisted on packing into his basket. When asked wherein the charm of this meal consisted, she always laughed and avoided a direct reply: and if—as occasionally happened—she made the assertion in the presence of Robert de Castres, that worthy individual's countenance was observed, by the curious, to display an expression of pained embarrassment by no means natural to it.

Perhaps the recklessness of her humour had something to do with the liveliness of the meal. She had come out to enjoy herself before the wet blanket of Robert's excellent intentions descended once more upon her life. Sarrasin was a little astonished by her gaiety. She seemed almost as much of a child as Bob.

"You are fond of a picnic, it seems, madame," he said, smiling across at her radiant face.

"Yes—it is because I have had so few of them," she answered lightly. "You must know I am a very well-behaved person in general, M. d'Hérista, though, no doubt, you do not think so at this moment, and I admit I am rather mad this afternoon.—Bob, you need not set yourself on fire in order to make the kettle boil quicker! —Yes, I am really very well-behaved as a rule. I do what other people tell me, and take all the disagreeable consequences of their advice with a perfectly angelic amiability. I am always ready to be managed, and some one seems always to be managing me. Of course you do not understand that, because no one would dream of trying to manage you."

"Why not, madame?" Sarrasin said, laughing.

Clothilde laughed too, and spread a tea-cloth upon a little square rock.

"Because you are too big, I think," she answered, "and too—oh—I do not quite know what. But it would be like trying to run a wind-mill with the mistral, or turn the sea into a patent washing-tub. You do not mean to tell me that any one has ever attempted these impossibilities?"

"Marthe—my old servant—has a rooted idea that I ought to take care of myself, and tries to make me carry it out for her," Sarrasin said seri-

ously. "She once presented me with an umbrella, in order that I should not get a cold in my head—I do not know why, because I never have colds. The umbrella had been in her family for three generations, and was all the colours of the rainbow. I put it up once, and it has never consented to come down again. Marthe goes to church with it sometimes—she seems to think it appropriate to early mass, I fancy. As it will not shut, she leaves it open in Father Pasquiou's garden until she comes out again."

"What a terrible risk! Suppose some one were to run away with it?"

"Some one might as easily run away with the church, or the presbytère. Marthe's umbrella is as well known as I am, madame. But you see there is some one in the world who tries to manage me."

"So it seems—but I do not think she has succeeded very well, M. de Hérista," Clothilde said gaily. "You do not put that poor umbrella to its right use, I am afraid.—Bob, pray take care! You have dropped a sardine into your tea!"

Bob fished the sardine thoughtfully from his cup, and then proceeded to taste, first the fish, and then the tea.

"You dreadful child, what are you doing?"

"It hasn't hurt the sardine, maman," he responded consolingly. "And a *little* taste of fish is rather nice in the tea."

"Bob is a terribly original person," Clothilde said, turning to Sarrasin. "He is a great anxiety to his uncle, who imagines that all little boys ought to be cut on the same pattern. Poor Robert! He finds Bob is not so easily managed as I am."

Sarrasin looked up at her uneasily. He remembered Bob's confession of the morning. "But do you do what he tells you—always?"

"When he tells me to do something particularly bad for me, I always seem to do it," Clothilde said a little bitterly. She was thinking of De Fleury, and somehow the thought did not go well with the sea, and the pine-trees, and the tall, blue figure which sat opposite to her, sedately drinking tea out of Bob's pet mug, brought especially for the occasion, and decorated with the presentments of various realistically dreadful insects with multitudinous wings and legs.

"Yes, I nearly always do what Robert says," Clothilde continued rather sadly, "and I am nearly always sorry for it afterward. He is so fond of me, and he invariably means so well, that I really can not help it."

"You should help it!"

She looked at him curiously. His tone was curt and cold.

"Oh, no doubt. But it is difficult to refuse him anything, you know. If you knew him, you would know how difficult."

"I think I am rather glad I do not know him," the Dauphin responded impolitely.

"Yes? Oh, you would like him immensely—but he would not like you. You are not commonplace enough for him."

"I never thought I was particularly original."

"That is why you are not commonplace. Your ordinary person always imagines himself brilliantly original.—Bob, M. d'Hérستا and I have both finished, and you are still eating."

Bob paused for an instant, with his mouth very full, and an expression of tempered rapture upon his small face.

"I thought," he said delicately, "that if I finished up as much as I could, maman, we should not have such a lot to take home."

"The boat will not sink with the vast quantity you have left, Bob," Sarrasin said gravely.

Bob sighed, and regarded the last corner of a huge ham sandwich with obvious and unashamed regret.

"I could have eaten a good deal more, if it had been here," he remarked. "I suppose it's the sea air."

"You are a greedy little boy," Clothilde said laughingly. "Come—make haste! We want to go."

Bob sadly obeyed, and began packing the teapot. Sarrasin had risen to his feet, and was looking at the sea with an expression of uneasiness. The wind had fallen, as he had predicted.

The sea was no longer blue, but a dull, leaden colour streaked here and there with ominous veins of green. The sparkling air had become heavy, and the brilliant sky had grown grey. In the distance, a vague mutter of thunder echoed among the hills.

"There is going to be a storm," Clothilde exclaimed, pausing over a half-filled basket.

Sarrasin did not answer for a moment. He was still studying the sea.

"I am afraid you are right, madame," he said at last. "The truth is, I should have attended to the weather, but I quite forgot——" He paused for a second and did not finish his sentence. "We must leave the boat here, and go on to L'Orayas."

Clothilde could not repress an exclamation of dismay. She hated thunderstorms, and the prospect of a walk through the forest in the middle of one did not appeal to her at all pleasantly.

"Oh, M. d'Hérasta, can not we go back in the boat?"

"It is quite impossible. I am very sorry, but there is nothing for it but L'Orayas."

His tone was decisive, and she submitted. The baskets were packed into the boat, and they groped through the brushwood into the path beyond. The forest had grown dark, and the muttering of thunder was audibly louder. Bob broke the silence which had fallen upon them.

"It is going to be a very bad storm," he remarked, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Do not frighten madame your mother like that, Bob!" Sarrasin said, rather sharply.

Even in the growing gloom, Bob's surprised indignation was clearly to be seen.

"I thought she would like it," he said. "What is the good of being out in the forest, *miles* away from home"—he gloated over this point—"in a little storm? I hope it will be as bad as it can be."

"And that is exactly what is going to happen, my dear Bob," Clothilde answered, with a nervous laugh, and trying not to start, as a vivid flash of lightning lit up the darkness. "It is going to be as bad as even you can wish."

She had hardly spoken when a roar of thunder seemed to shake the very hills above them. The rapidity with which such storms come on in that part of the world is as remarkable and unpleasant as their violence. For a second, every twig of the pines beside the path stood out against a blinding background of blue flame. Then followed inky blackness, and the rain began to hiss among the dry leaves over their heads.

"Thank God, there is the rain!" Sarrasin said, in a tone of such profound relief that Clothilde was startled.

"You were afraid?"

"Yes, madame—for you," he said simply.

The danger was still very real. The light-

ning still came in forked flashes of pale lilac; or blue; but the hiss of the rain grew gradually steadier, and large drops began to fall upon them through the thick screen of the boughs. Bob emerged from the snubbed silence into which he had fallen since the Dauphin's reproof.

"We shall be wet through long before we get to L'Orayas," he said with such irrepressible joyfulness that both his companions laughed.

"Bob, you are quite incorrigible. It will—— What was that?"

The thunder drowned the words, but Clothilde stood still. As soon as silence returned, she repeated her query. The Dauphin stopped and listened.

"I do not hear anything. What was it, madame?"

"I am sure I heard some one call. There it is again."

This time the sound was unmistakable. Some one was shouting for help with a vigour which indicated that the assistance demanded was not required for his powers of making himself heard.

"It comes from the right, I am sure. Let us go and see, M. d'Hérista."

Sarrasin shouted an answer, and the cry came back loud with hope. They picked their way under the pine-trees for five minutes, still led by the sound of the voice. Presently they almost

stumbled upon two figures advancing toward them. A glare of lightning lit up, with dramatic cruelty, two very white faces, stamped with expressions descriptive of varying degrees of dejection and astonishment, and then went out, leaving the situation in darkness.

There was a silence—also dramatic; and then out of the darkness rose simultaneously three voices, pitched in three separate keys of amazement, horror, and relief.

“Clothilde!”

“Madame de Maillane!”

“Robert—and M. de Fleury!”

XXIX

CLOTHILDE DE MAILLANE rose on the following morning with a vague sense of oppression, prophetic of unpleasantness to come. Robert was coming to lunch—without De Fleury—and she was quite sure that he would be trying. He had been trying so often during her experience of him, that she knew quite well what to expect. She dressed slowly, and looked at the beautiful reflection which met her in the glass with a quaint air of humorous melancholy. Even her interest in the devils of Hérística failed before the idea of her affectionate brother in a state of unimpeachable common sense, and with the strict intention of doing her a real kindness.

Robert's real kindnesses, she knew well, were far, far more to be dreaded than the worst malice of other people.

She looked regretfully at her cotton dresses, her muslin fichus, her broad, country hat. No, it would not do to put any of these on this morning. She had seen the look of horror directed by Robert at her attire on the previous afternoon, and she determined, at any rate, to avoid a lecture on the suitable, and unsuitable, in dress. She selected the latest thing in her wardrobe and put it on, rather unwillingly. It was a very up-to-date vision that awaited Robert de Castres on the terrace, half an hour later.

As she sat waiting under the mimosa-trees, she could not help laughing a little at the memory of that meeting in the forest. It was the last thing in the world that ought to have happened, and yet she was rather glad that it had done so. She was glad to have seen De Fleury's face, green with genuine terror, in that flash of lightning. It had settled one thing, at least. It had simplified her interview with Robert. She knew what she would say about De Fleury now.

It was not surprising that she had contrasted De Fleury's terror with Sarrasin's calm. The Dauphin d'Hérista was not afraid of a little thunder, she reflected; and the comparison she made was not complimentary to poor De Fleury.

Robert de Castres cut short her meditations. He was very different from the dejected figure in

the forest, and he looked, she admitted to herself sadly, as though he was firmly resolved to do his duty toward her. There was a mild severity on his most jovial features, and his greetings, though affectionate, had a certain solemnity foreign to them on ordinary occasions.

"You reached home safely, Clothilde?" he began, taking his seat beside her under the trees.

Clothilde's spirits began to rise.

"Yes, dear Robert," she said sweetly. "We had a delightful sail back. M. d'Hérasta brought the boat up from the rocks to L'Orayas, and it was a beautiful evening after the storm. I have not taken cold. I changed my shoes when I came home, and put on dry stockings. I do not think even you could have behaved more admirably."

Robert de Castres looked at her with a puzzled air. He could never understand when any one made fun of him, though he always had a dim suspicion that something was very wrong on such occasions.

"You are sure you have not taken cold? I have some very good lozenges——"

"I have not the slightest suspicion of a cold."

He seemed relieved, and sat back in his chair.

"You know you have placed me in a very awkward position," he said gravely. "I could

not tell De Fleury you were unable to receive him because you were ill, after meeting you in that—ah—very unexpected manner, yesterday.”

“No?” Clothilde answered, with an air of innocence.

“Of course not. I had to say I had business at Cannes.”

“How clever of you! And did he believe it?”

“I do not think he did,” poor Robert returned sadly. “He looked very tragic when I said good-bye, at any rate. Ah, Clothilde, how you can trifle with such affection as that——”

“I do not want M. de Fleury’s affection,” she broke in hastily. “Pray do not worry me about him, Robert, for it is of no sort of use.”

Robert assumed an attitude of explanation which she knew well—too well.

“Now do listen to me, Clothilde. Believe me, I am speaking for your good. De Fleury is a most admirable character, I assure you.”

Clothilde shook out her skirts over the gravel with a little gesture of supreme aggravation.

“Oh, my dearest Robert, I do not want to marry an admirable character. What an appalling idea! Do you wish me to begin improving my mind at my time of life?”

Her interruption had no sort of effect. Robert went on as calmly as though she had not spoken: “I have known him for twenty years, and I have come to the conclusion, after mature

consideration, that he is the one man in the world who will make you happy."

"But I have not come to that conclusion at all," she said sharply. "I do not want to marry M. de Fleury, and I will not be forced into doing so. You spoiled my life once, Robert. You shall not do so again."

Poor De Castres sat, a picture of outraged benevolence, in his chair.

"I, Clothilde? You accuse me of spoiling your life?"

She went on mercilessly: "You married me to Louis. I will not say anything against him, for he is dead; but I was very unhappy with him, and you know it. Now you have taken up M. de Fleury. You wish me to marry him. You say he will make me happy. How do you know? How can you arrange my happiness? I am very happy as I am, and I will not have anything to say to your friend."

"But—only consider. You are a great deal too young, and too pretty——"

"Thank you," Clothilde returned, unsoftened by even this complimentary form of assault. "I am not too pretty to do as I like, I suppose, and I am not too young to have ideas of my own. And I am getting older—and uglier," she added, with a smile, "every day."

"But, for Bob's sake——"

She played her trump card down as boldly as Robert had played his.

"But what has Bob to do with it? If I can not manage him—as you say, for I did not know it myself—do you imagine he will submit to a man who is afraid of a flash of lightning?"

"My dear Clothilde, that is too much! De Fleury has nerves—the electricity affects them."

"Does the electricity make him turn green?" she inquired innocently.

"And you are desperately afraid of a thunderstorm yourself."

She laughed.

"Oh, that is quite a different thing. But I am not going to marry a man who is afraid of a thunderstorm—or of anything else. Except, perhaps, of me," she added.

Robert eyed her with an air of uneasy suspicion.

"I hope you are not growing romantic, Clothilde?"

"I hope not, for I never was romantic in my life. Come, Robert, do be sensible. Why should I marry a man I do not care for, just because you have decided it is good for me? Poor M. de Fleury is not a new kind of patent medicine that I should swallow him down by the advice of my doctor, you know."

"You are so obstinate."

"So are you, for you will never learn that I am not a child. Send M. de Fleury back to Paris, and come and stay with me, and let us enjoy ourselves."

"In the society of the Dauphin d'Hérista!" Robert de Castres murmured, with a clumsy attempt at irony.

In an instant she flared up hotly.

"And why not, pray? The Dauphin d'Hérista is an older title than yours, or mine: and the Dauphin himself is as fine a gentleman as I have ever met. It would not be you who honoured him with your society, but he who honoured you with his—you may be quite sure of that."

Robert de Castres lost his temper. It was a rare event with him, and in this case he made a grave mistake.

"You seem so sure of it," he said, "that I am not surprised you refuse to marry De Fleury."

XXX

THERE was a moment of silence. Clothilde was very angry. She sat quite still in her chair, and her face went very white.

"Be good enough to explain what you mean by that speech, Robert," she said at last.

Her brother was as angry as she was, but with this difference—while she kept unnaturally cool, he lost his head.

"I will explain, if you like. Do you think I am a fool? I could see with half an eye that the man is in love with you. I suppose you are in love with him too, as you defend him so vio-

lently. Well, you had better marry him, and repair his title with your fortune, if you think so highly of it. I dare say he will not object to a rich wife."

Clothilde sprang to her feet. She was white to the lips, and her eyes were blazing with anger—those gay brown eyes which looked almost incapable of wrath. Even Robert de Castres shrank a little before her.

"Oh, how dare you—how dare you?" she said passionately. "How can you have the insolence to say such a thing—and of him, of all people in the world? It is the most infamously unjust accusation I ever heard! He does not want money. He has none, and I do not believe he ever thinks of it. He is as simple and as unworldly as a child. And as for the rest"—she paused and continued more slowly—"even if I loved him, what would that be to you?"

"He is a kind of fishmonger, you know," Robert de Castres cried, in considerable excitement.

She laughed.

"I suppose he is—to you. I am ashamed of you, Robert. You should know better than that, for the De Castres, at any rate, were never *nouveaux riches*. And as for my being in love with him, you are wrong, and you know you are wrong, and you have no right to say such a thing to me. But I will tell you this much. You say that M. d'Hérística is in love with me. Very well!

If he wished me to marry him, I give you my word of honour that I would accept him—yes, to prove to you that he is my equal, and yours.”

Robert de Castres did not lunch that day at Hérista!

XXXI

THE long-suffering Duchesse de Maillane had never been quite so angry with her interfering relative before. She was still so angry after he had gone that she refused luncheon, and locked herself into her room alone. To Bob's questions she answered that Uncle Robert had been very rude; upon which Bob gave voice to the unchristian desire to kill Uncle Robert.

It was, perhaps, this fearful sentiment which directed Bob's steps to the Vaillots' cottage at the end of the garden, where the gun which his mother had been induced to give him was always kept, under the strict care of M. Vaillot himself. Bob was not allowed to touch it, except under M. Vaillot's instruction. Naturally his adventurous spirit chafed beneath the burden of these restrictions, and he longed most ardently for an opportunity of handling his treasure uninstructed and alone.

Now it happened on this occasion that Madame Vaillot was washing at the stream, some distance away, and that her big husband was oc-

cupied at the other end of the garden. Consequently, the cottage was empty. Bob went in and looked about. His gun was standing in the corner, and he regarded it for a while with longing eyes. He was forbidden to touch it, except in M. Vaillot's presence, but the temptation was irresistible. He went up to it softly, and touched the magic barrel with a caressing finger. It felt so beautifully smooth, and the chill of the cold metal sent a delicious thrill through him—a thrill, intoxicating, maddening, which made of an otherwise conscientious little boy a blind creature preyed upon by one ungovernable desire. So might the Indian brave of his favourite fiction have felt with the handle of the tomahawk between his fingers. For a second poor Bob struggled gallantly to retreat, but it was in vain. He could not take his hand from the delightful thing. He was bewitched, possessed, by the glamour a weapon always has for a boy. He stood rooted to the ground, his eyes fixed upon the gun.

His scruples melted away—they had never been very powerful. With a stealthy movement he grasped the gun, and slipped out of the cottage. His eyes took in the situation at a glance. The Vaillots occupied—his mother disposed of for the afternoon—oh, what unimagined and heavenly good-fortune! The scolding which would certainly wind up his escapade was nothing in comparison with the rapture of handling

that gun for an hour or two, in peace. Of course it was not loaded, but he could make believe it was. He had no idea that M. Vaillot had loaded it half an hour before, meaning to go out and shoot a rabbit for supper. The big gardener was a faithful adorer of the Dauphin d'Hérista, and shot in the forest—or in that part of it which still belonged to Sarrasin, which was not extensive—as often as he liked.

Bob shouldered the gun and marched off gaily. It was early in the afternoon, and no one was about. It was an unprecedented act of industry which had induced the Vaillots to go to work so soon after *déjeuner*.

He made his way straight into the forest, with the instinct of an animal seeking cover. If any one approached him here, he could soon slip into hiding. But here, too, no one was stirring. The parasol pines spread themselves darkly on their red sticks, making the round, even patches of shade which justified their name. Big blue bees hummed upon hedges of flowering myrtle, and a gorgeous swallow-tailed butterfly flaunted across the path like a flying flame of gold. The cicadas sprang up before him, as though their little brown bodies contained springs. An occasional magpie chattered overhead. Bob's heart was bursting into a guilty joy.

He thought of the *sangliers* which the forest was supposed to harbour, and shivered with rapture. If one were only to appear, he could pre-

tend to stalk it! If only a rabbit would kindly show the end of its tail! He aimed at a magpie, which seemed much alarmed, and flew away, chattering excitedly. Bob chuckled with supreme satisfaction. He was gulping life down in large mouthfuls, he was stalking through the primeval forests of the world, weapon in hand, to deal destruction to all that approached him. The wood was full of savages thirsting for his blood. Every leaf was ambush for a poisoned arrow; every twig concealed a malevolent, watching eye. Lions lurked behind every bush, tigers—ferocious man-eaters—stepped behind him softly on deadly velvet pads. Snakes, whose lightest stroke was fatal, hung from every branch which jutted across the path. A boa-constrictor or two were waiting for him further on.

He caught a glimpse of the sea, between the trees. It shone blue and peaceful under the glowing sun, but he knew that it simply swarmed with sharks, varied by a selection of devil-fish several sizes larger than anything mentioned in his favourite chapter of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. He passed a stream; its banks were alive with hungry alligators and blood-thirsty crocodiles. A massive pine took on the shape of a mad elephant preparing for the charge. A rock changed abruptly into a hippopotamus about to attack him. Oh, it was a glorious hour!

He swaggered down the path, gun in hand, rapt in the creations of his own youthful imagina-

tion. He walked on air, the brim of his country hat brushed the stars. He had forgotten the stolen nature of his delights; he was absolutely unscrupulous and without conscience. The passion of adventure had taken entire possession of his soul.

In this elated condition, he became aware of a dark figure ambling in front of him down the path. "Amble" describes the figure's mode of locomotion most accurately. It had a kind of weak-kneed shuffle, varied at times by a staggering trot, which struck even Bob's moonstruck eyes as peculiar. The young hunter of wild beasts slipped behind a tree to make observations.

The figure advanced, always in the same curiously uncertain fashion, as though propelled by some power outside itself, which yet had not complete control over it. All at once Bob recognised the figure as Sibylle Moro.

He had seen Sibylle Moro before, and he was not afraid of him. Besides, twenty Sibylle Moros would not have frightened him just then. He stepped out of his ambush, and boldly approached the shambling figure. At first, Sibylle showed no sign of recognition. His ragged, wretched figure continued to advance in the same eccentric manner as before. His eyes were wild and gleaming under the rough masses of hair which fell forward over his terrible, vacant face. He muttered to himself as he came, but

Bob could not catch his words. Now and then he laughed, as though at his own wit.

He came nearer and nearer. His eyes fell on the boy, but he went on muttering and laughing.

Then suddenly—inexplicably, as it seemed to Bob—a change came over him. He saw the gun.

He stopped dead within a few feet of the boy. His features stiffened, as though before a physical shock. His eyes grew almost steady, and an expression of extraordinary cunning flashed across his face. An idea—an inspiration—had found its way into his disordered brain. He edged a little closer to Bob and spoke, with an insinuating leer at the gun.

“Beautiful—beautiful, m’sieu’! Ah, nobody else in Hérستا has such a treasure as that! The shine of it—a diamond in the sun, my little m’sieu’—no less!”

Bob smiled graciously. He decided that Sibylle Moro was by no means so mad as most people seemed to think.

“I am glad you like it,” he said, with marked amiability.

Sibylle’s evil eyes glittered.

“Like it! Ah, m’sieu’, you may well say that. There—it steals the heart out of me, to see the gleam of it. I have handled the pretty things in my time, m’sieu’—yes, even I, Sibylle Moro. What times I had in the forests! Ah, those were the days to live!”

He was coherent, comprehensible, for the first time for years. He was even almost sane—for the moment. That is to say, he was sane enough to lay his plans, to carry them out; to trap the boy into doing what he wished. His eyes shone, his fingers reached themselves longingly toward the gun; but he restrained himself, and grinned into Bob's face with a hideous semblance of gaiety.

"Ah, m'sieu', it is I who could tell you stories! The things I have shot in my time! Well—well—it is far away now."

Bob was fast growing interested. His grasp upon the gun relaxed.

"Did you ever shoot a lion?" he inquired eagerly.

"Lions?" Sibylle made a sprawling gesture of contempt, which signified that other people might fill their bags with lions, if they chose—he aimed at higher game. "There, m'sieu', you do not know—how should you? Lions, indeed! Now what is a lion, I should like to know? Four legs, and a tail—that is all. A nothing, m'sieu'—a mere cat—a disreputable sandy cat!"

Bob felt awed. A man who talked in this lofty way of the King of Beasts must really be a very superior sort of person. He was more certain than ever that Sibylle could not be mad.

"Well, but they are rather large cats," he said meekly.

Sibylle waved the subject of lions from him

into the farthest fields of space, with a gesture of magnificent disdain.

"Lions! No, m'sieu', do not speak of them. They are not worthy of you. They are poor things—they have four legs and a tail, as I say. That beautiful thing you hold was meant for better creatures than lions. Ah, the look of it—the touch of it!"

"Would you like to look at it?" Bob said, innocently falling into the trap laid for him.

Sibylle's hands went out like claws. He almost hugged the gun to his heart. He rocked to and fro in an ecstasy of delight. He began to mutter to himself, and his eyes glowed. He seemed to have forgotten Bob's existence.

Bob grew a little uneasy. The light in the madman's eyes frightened him, though he did not know that it meant murder.

"If you have finished looking at it," he said, politely, "will you give it back to me, please? I—I think I am rather in a hurry."

Sibylle did not give up the gun. He took a few steps up the path. Bob walked after him. His heart was beginning to beat rather hard, and his hands were cold.

"Sibylle, please—my gun."

Sibylle quickened his pace. He was muttering to himself, and laughing, and hugging the gun, as though it had been alive. He did not even look back at the spectacle of the boy's dismay.

“Sibylle, my gun—oh, please—my gun—my gun!”

Sibylle trotted on. Bob stood still, his lips quivering, his eyes full of tears. He tried hard not to cry, and he was afraid to pursue his lost treasure any further. He no longer doubted that Sibylle Moro was mad.

The shambling figure turned a corner in the path, and disappeared behind the screen of pines.

He was laughing to himself. His face was alight with a terrible joy. His lips kissed the barrel of the gun.

“To-night!” he chuckled, “to-night—ah, black Devil-Dauphin—you shall pay your debts to-night!”

XXXII

POOR Bob slunk home dejectedly, a sadder and a wiser boy. It was bad enough to have lost his gun, but he was now face to face with the fact that in a few hours at latest the loss was bound to be discovered, and his disobedience with it. He knew that his mother would be very angry, for she never broke her own promise, and she always expected him to keep his. He had disobeyed her express orders, and he had broken his word. Even Clothilde’s indulgence was not proof against such crimes as these.

Chrysander was at the villa when he returned, and, almost for the first time, Bob was grateful

for his presence. It was a momentary protection, at any rate. The boy slipped into a corner and sat awaiting the developments of Fate. Madame Vaillot came in to light the lamps, and he shivered with guilty dread; but she did not look at him, or seem in any way disturbed. Evidently, no one had observed the absence of the gun from its place. But sooner or later it would all be discovered—he knew that. He began almost to feel anxious for the worst, that his suspense might be over.

Chrysander went away in due course. He looked ill and worn, and would not stay to dinner. Bob watched him disappear, and trembled. Perhaps his mother knew, all the time, and was only waiting until her visitor had gone, to tell him so. But no! Nothing of the kind happened. They went in to dinner. Bob started every time Madame Vaillot's angular figure appeared at the door with a tray. Once he heard her husband's deep voice in the passage and gave himself up for lost. He laid down his knife and fork, and turned pale—but the big gardener was only helping his wife to bring in the dinner.

Dinner over, he spent a wretched half-hour on the terrace. At the end of it, he was almost ready to confess everything to his mother; but when she called him in to go to bed, his courage failed him. He went off with a heavy heart, and lay awake in his little bed upstairs, listening for

any sound which should tell him that his offence had been discovered.

At last the blow fell. Clothilde was reading in the music-room, where she was fond of sitting in the evening. There was a knock at the door and M. Vaillot appeared, looking very large and obviously disturbed.

"Madame will pardon me for disturbing her at this hour of the night?" he began politely.

Clothilde laid down her book. Her mind flew at once to the conclusion that his appearance had something to do with the devils of Hérستا.

"What has happened, Vaillot?"

"M'sieu' Bob's gun is gone, madame."

"Gone! What do you mean? Is it not in your cottage?"

"No, madame. It was there just after *déjeuner*, because I loaded it before I went out, meaning to go into the forest as soon as I had planted the new rose trees you had sent from Paris. Well, when I had done that, you remember you sent me into Saint Raphaël for a book. I never thought of the gun until five minutes ago, when I remembered that I had better unload it, for fear of accident. I went to look for it, but it was gone."

"That is extraordinary. Who can have taken it?"

She never thought of Bob. Had she not forbidden him to touch the gun, without Vaillot?

And he was a boy who had always kept his word.

The big gardener looked embarrassed. He did not like to accuse the boy, and yet—the gun was loaded.

“There is M’sieu’ Bob, madame—he is always very eager to handle the gun—and I was not there to give it to him.”

“But I forbade him to touch it unless you were there!” Clothilde exclaimed. “He could not possibly do such a thing.”

“M’sieu’ Bob is a boy, madame; and boys will be boys, you know,” the big man said philosophically.

Clothilde rose from her chair.

“I will go and ask him if he has seen it. Wait here, Vaillot—I do not like the idea of not knowing where the thing is, as you say it is loaded.”

She went upstairs to the little white bed wherein Bob lay quaking, aware that he was discovered at last.

“Are you awake, Bob?”

“Yes, maman,” a trembling voice answered, with heartrending meekness.

“Vaillot can not find your gun. Have you seen it?”

There was a dead silence. Bob burrowed as far as he could into the pillow.

“Answer me, Bob. Have you touched that gun?”

A stifled sob escaped into the depths of the pillow. Clothilde stood by the bedside looking shocked and pained.

"Oh, Bob—and you promised me not to go near it!"

Bob sobbed a little louder, and tried to burrow a little deeper, but failed. He remembered reading of people who felt, in certain circumstances, that they wished they could sink into the earth. He understood that aspiration now, and sympathised with it most sincerely. If the bed would only turn into a volcano and receive him into its fiery crater, he would be grateful.

"Crying will not do any good," Clothilde said severely. "The gun was loaded, and you might have shot yourself, or some one else. Did you fire at anything?"

"No, maman," sniffed the culprit.

"And what did you do with it—where did you put it? Tell me at once where you have hidden it now!"

This was too much for Bob. He broke into an open wail.

"Oh, maman—I didn't hide it. I don't know where it is. Sibylle Moro met me in the forest and"—a burst of grief—"took it away!"

"Sibylle Moro!" Clothilde knew the story of Thérèse—knew, too, Sibylle's hatred of the Dauphin. She gave Bob a look he never forgot—a look which startled him so that he stopped crying.

"He has taken it to shoot M. d'Hérista!" she said. "And, if he succeeds, Bob, you will have killed him."

Then she turned and ran downstairs. Vaillot was standing, waiting for her, in the hall.

"He took the gun," she said, looking up at the big man with terrified eyes, "and Sibylle Moro took it away from him. Vaillot, he will kill the Dauphin. Oh, what shall we do?"

For a moment she stood there, utterly at a loss, utterly confounded. Then with a supreme effort she pulled herself together.

"We must not lose any time. Get the boat ready at once, Vaillot. I will go and call Father Pasquiou. We must go over to the château—he could not do anything until night, and perhaps we may be in time."

"He will go up by the outer staircase to the Dauphin's tower," Vaillot said. "Madame—it will be no use. We shall be too late!"

"Oh, no—no!" she cried passionately. She almost pushed Vaillot toward the door. Another moment, and she burst into Father Pasquiou's little *presbytère*, and explained the situation to him in half a dozen words.

The old man looked at her in bewilderment.

"But what can I do, madame?"

"Come with me—you may be able to stop Sibylle—you are a priest—he will obey you—he always did."

The curé was out of his little toy house in a

moment. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he forgot his hat—he forgot Jeanne's certain indignation—he forgot that he would be sure to catch cold. He ran after Clothilde, his shabby *soutane* fluttering about his legs. Side by side they reached the landing-place of the villa, and found Vaillot already in the boat.

"Madame—you have nothing to keep you warm," the gardener said, as Clothilde sprang in. "Let me go back and fetch a shawl."

She held him back, almost by force.

"No—do not lose an instant! What does it matter about me? He will be killed—oh, make haste, Vaillot—only make haste!"

Vaillot caught up his oars. The boat bounded forward across the dark water. Clothilde sat, white and silent, her face drawn with terrible fear. Father Pasquiou seized an oar and rowed too. In the starlight, she could see that his lips moved as he bent to the oar.

He was praying for the man who was in such great danger. Clothilde covered her face with her hands and tried to collect her whirling thoughts. She could not pray—she could not even think. Only, in her mind was one thing clear—if Sarrasin d'Hérasta died, she must die too.

That one fateful moment by Bob's bedside had altered for ever her attitude toward him. He was no more a picturesque figure in her life, but the one human being whose existence

mattered supremely to her—without whom the world was empty. She was carried away by the magnitude of his danger and the immensity of her fear. While he was in safety, she had not guessed the nature of her own sentiments toward him—she was not romantic, as she had told Robert de Castres only a few hours ago. But now she understood. He was in terrible danger—he was perhaps dying at that moment—he might even be dead: and she knew that she loved him.

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The boat grated against the château landing-place.

XXXIII

SARRASIN had gone to his own room rather earlier than usual that night. Chrysander had lent him a new book on fishing, and he settled down to read for a few hours before he went to bed. The table at which he sat was on the side of the hearth farthest from the door, and nearest the little door in the corner which opened upon the broken staircase. Sarrasin's back was toward that particular point in the tapestry, behind which the door was hidden. Opposite him, on the carved cabinet, stood the great silver crucifix which had been the gift of Saint Dominic.

He read for an hour without looking up from his book. Old Marthe had gone to bed long

ago, in a distant corner of the great building, and the intense silence was only broken by the faint whisper of the sea far below. Sarrasin was used to silence, and solitude. His nerves were of steel; he had never realised the danger of Sibylle Moro's delusions with regard to himself; he never even took the trouble to bolt the little door behind the tapestry at night. The ghost of the wicked Dauphine, who had murdered her husband in that room, was almost as likely to come up by it, he thought, as any human being.

He read steadily, for he was interested. Presently, as he read, there came upon him that strange sense of being watched which the presence of an unseen person often causes. He turned over a page, looked round again, and went on reading.

But the sensation of being watched still haunted him, and his interest in the book was gone, though he went on reading with a steady determination. It was quite a quarter of an hour later that a slight sound caught his ear. He turned in his chair, and looked toward the quarter whence the sound seemed to come.

It was too late. He was fairly trapped.

The tapestry had been pushed aside, and Sibylle Moro's wild figure filled the little doorway. There was a smile of insane joy upon his face, as he stood with the gun levelled full upon the man whom he hated.

Sarrasin's first impulse was to spring upon

him, and take his chance of being shot before he could get hold of the gun. But on second thought he decided that that would mean simply self-destruction. Sibylle would fire before he could move from his chair. He might not hit him, but the chances were ten to one that he would, for he was too near to miss, except by a miracle. Sarrasin was a brave man, and he showed himself none the less brave because he realised at once how grave was the danger in which he stood, and how very little chance he had either of rescue or escape.

Old Marthe was disposed of for the night. Besides, she slept at the other end of the château, and would certainly hear nothing. No human being would come within a mile of the château for the next twelve hours. If Sarrasin had guessed that the gun was Bob's, he might have had a hope that some one would miss it, and suspect Sibylle of having taken it. But it happened that Bob, by some curious chance, had never shown him his new treasure. Perhaps the boy did not like to confess the conditions under which he possessed it. At any rate, Sarrasin knew nothing of the gun, except that Sibylle must certainly have stolen it, and, equally certain, meant to kill him with it.

He sat motionless, looking at the hideous face which glared upon him above the muzzle of the gun. Sibylle was enjoying his hour of triumph to the uttermost. His was the devilish

spirit of vengeance which desires to torture before it kills. He had no desire to let his enemy off cheaply. He wanted him to realise his condition before the end—to die a dozen deaths by anticipation.

But he had chosen the wrong man for such a revenge when he chose the Dauphin d'Hérista. Sarrasin faced him as calmly as though the gun were in his own hands, and Sibylle as entirely at his mercy as he was, at that moment, at Sibylle's.

"What are you doing there?" he said. There was not a tremor in his deep, clear tones, and he did not raise his voice. His steady gaze was fixed upon the maniac's face.

Sibylle laughed his hideous, cackling laughter.

"Ah! what am I doing there—eh, my fine m'sieu?" he said. "What am I doing, do you want to know, M. le Dauphin? Is that it? Well, I am taking a little treat I promised myself long ago. I am making you the little visit that I swore I would make when you took my pretty Thérèse away to your castle of all the devils, you Devil of Hérista!"

He paused, gloating over his own words. Sarrasin's eyes darkened under the accusation.

"You lie, Sibylle Moro," he said, still quietly. "I did not take Thérèse away. She never entered the château. She might have done so if she had wished—as my wife. I would have taken

her from you if I could, but I could not, for she would not come. It was not I who stole her from you."

Sibylle chuckled, and grasped the gun tighter.

"Ah! is it I who lie? Liar and thief and devil, is it I who lie? It is you, my fine, noble Dauphin, that is who it is. Oh, you are a great gentleman—yes. You live in a castle; you call yourself Sarrasin d'Hérista. It is a beautiful name, that—yes, indeed. But you are a liar and a thief all the same, and I will show you how such creatures should be punished."

"You are mad," Sarrasin answered, with a look of patient contempt.

Sibylle laughed.

"Yes. I am mad—I know that. And who made me mad, Devil-Dauphin? Answer me that! Who but yourself, when you stole my little Thérèse? Oh, I am not easily deceived. I saw you walking with her in the forest, and sitting beside her on the rocks. I heard the pretty things you said—the pretty things that turned her heart from me. And then she went away—the night before her wedding-day and mine. Oh, it was a happy wedding-day for me, that! All day I searched the wood and the rocks. All day—all day—ah, what a gay, happy wedding-day for me! And then night fell, and I was mad."

He broke off, trembling as though at the rec-

ollection of that long-past agony. Sarrasin's face softened as he watched him.

"I remember that day only too well," he said gently. "I do not think you suffered more than I did, Sibylle."

The madman's face was convulsed with hate and fury.

"You—you—you?" he screamed. "*You* remember—you suffered? You dare to tell me that? And she was in your castle all the time, until you turned her and her child out to die—my little Thérèse—my wife whom I lost on her wedding-day!"

Sarrasin hesitated for a moment. Apart from any consideration of his own safety, he wanted to convince Sibylle of his mistake. He wanted to protest his own innocence, still, without any idea of saving his life. He pitied Sibylle so profoundly that he would have given all he possessed to remove this terrible delusion from his mind.

"Listen to me, Sibylle," he said earnestly. "You may shoot me, if you like—I am in your power, and I can not prevent it. But I swear to you by everything that I hold sacred, that I never harmed Thérèse. I shall not say so any more—it is the last word I will speak to you. If I had taken Thérèse in the way you think—if I had turned her out to die, and abandoned her child to strangers—I should be worthy, and ten times worthy, of anything you could do to me."

I should be a liar, and a thief, and a coward, as you say I am. But I did not do it. I swear to you on that crucifix there"—he held out his hand toward the silver crucifix of St. Dominic—"that I did not. I give you my word of honour that I have done you no wrong. You may believe me or not, as you like."

Sibylle laughed insultingly.

"Liar—do you think I shall believe you? I do not believe one word that comes out of your mouth—I will never believe it. Oh, I will not let you off, for all your smooth speeches. I am going to kill you to-night. Do you hear? Black Devil-Dauphin, I am going to send you to your father the Devil, who is no blacker or falser than you."

Sarrasin's patience was exhausted. He shrugged his shoulders and sat silent. He did not for a moment doubt that Sibylle would keep his word, but the idea of a struggle with that raving creature was so repellent to him that he did not move. He might as well be shot sitting still, as not. It would be less trouble, and it was certainly less undignified.

He sat motionless, quietly awaiting Sibylle's bullet. But the *absintheur* was in no hurry. If he had been less deliberate, less bent on taunting his enemy, his vengeance would have been assured. But he heaped insult upon insult on the tall blue figure which faced him so calmly. He exhausted himself in wild curses, in still wilder

mockery. He put his finger to the trigger, and then removed it. He laughed, he raved, he lingered with a diabolical enjoyment over his revenge.

Sarrasin sat silent through everything, looking at the wild figure and terrible face with eyes that never faltered from their steady gaze.

Suddenly, while Sibylle cursed, and laughed, and fingered the trigger, Sarrasin's ear caught a sound on the staircase without. It was a sound as of people ascending very quietly and cautiously, but it was unmistakable. For the first time he was conscious of some sort of excitement. Some one was attempting to rescue him—some one had got into the château; how, he did not know. It could only be an expedition of rescue at that hour of the night. No accident could have brought any one to the Château d'Hérista so late.

Would Sibylle hear it? If he heard, he would certainly fire at once, for fear lest his prey should escape. Sarrasin never removed his eyes from his would-be murderer's face. It was still alight with devilish satisfaction. He was laughing, and playing with the trigger. No—he heard nothing.

For what seemed a very long time, and was actually a couple of minutes, Sarrasin sat waiting, and listened to that sound of steps. It was almost incredible to him that Sibylle did not hear it, too; but the *absintheur* was too sure of his

position to dream of interruption. Before he suspected anything, the door had opened quickly and noiselessly. Father Pasquiou, followed by Madame de Maillane and Vaillot, had come into the room.

Old Marthe had left a door on the seaward side of the château unlocked. It was to that accident that her master owed his life.

XXXIV

THE old curé had entered first. He saw at once what had happened. He knew what would happen next, unless something—a miracle, perhaps—prevented it. The old priest, who had lived all his life under the pine-trees beside the great sea, had not lost his faith in miracles yet. It was well for Sarrasin d'Hérista that he had not.

For the fraction of a second he looked at Sarrasin, at Sibylle. Perhaps it was his deliberation, as much as anything, that saved Sarrasin. Had he shown any sign of haste, or of fear, Sibylle Moro would most assuredly have fired. But he was quite quiet. He had been breathless when he ran beside Clothilde to the landing-stage of the villa; he had pulled at the oar as vigorously as Vaillot. Now he was a little paler than usual, a little more erect—that was all.

His eye fell upon the tall silver crucifix of St. Dominic, gleaming in the lamplight upon its

high cabinet. He put out his hand and took it down, and walked across the room. There was no trace of haste in his step. His face was grave and still, his eyes shone with a new light.

He stood in front of the Dauphin, who made a gesture of protest, and would have caught his arm. The old man turned and looked at him. It was a look such as Sarrasin d'Hérستا had never seen on that gentle face, and he sat motionless before it. He could not interfere. A breathless awe had fallen upon the room.

The curé stood between the Dauphin and his enemy. Sibylle's finger was on the trigger. A dreadful look of baffled hatred crossed his face.

Father Pasquiou stood quite still. He had lifted the great crucifix in the air before him. The lamplight fell upon it, and upon his bare grey head, which seemed to shine with a reflected light.

"Sibylle Moro!"

His voice was low and steady. He spoke the name like one summoning an offender to punishment. His calm eyes looked straight at the black barrel of the gun.

"In the name of God, I command you to lay down that gun!"

He raised his voice a little now. It was clear, authoritative, resonant: it filled the breathless silence with the echo of a great power. A strange dignity had fallen upon his bent and shabby figure! He was no more an old man in a worn

soutane. He was the priest, the representative of the Church, standing face to face with hate and death, face to face with the evil, immemorial passions of men. He was the judge, in whose hands lay an authority not of earth; the protector whose soul might know no fear.

Sibylle's finger shifted from the trigger. An expression of bewilderment became visible in his face. He seemed confused, irresolute.

The curé repeated his command in the same quiet tone. The room was very still. At the door the big gardener was trembling like a frightened child, though not with fear. Clothilde held her breath; she was smiling an odd, triumphant smile as she looked at the old priest. She did not fear for Sarrasin's safety now, though Sibylle still held the gun. For the man was wavering. A power was upon him which he could not resist. His face had grown vacant, and the murderous light had gone out of his eyes.

For the third time Father Pasquiou repeated the command. Sibylle hesitated. Then he came forward slowly, with stiff, uncertain steps.

The curé held out his hand, without speaking. Sibylle gave up the gun.

A sob escaped Clothilde de Maillane. Sarrasin was saved.

Father Pasquiou turned to Vaillot.

"Take him to my house, and wait for me there," he said quietly.

Sibylle went to the door, moving like one in a dream. Vaillot took him by the arm and led him from the room. He made no movement of resistance. He seemed hardly conscious.

For a moment no one spoke. Father Pasquiou laid the gun on the table, and, almost mechanically, replaced the crucifix on the cabinet. Then he turned to Sarrasin with a sudden, impulsive gesture, and held out his hands. He was smiling his old kindly, half-apologetic smile, but his lips trembled, and the tears were in his eyes. The halo of a great heroism had vanished from his grey head. He was once more an old man in a shabby *soutane*, which was turning green at the seams.

Sarrasin had risen to his feet. He took the priest's hands and held them for a moment in silence. He could not speak. He did not know what to say, nor how to say it, but he knew what the old man had done.

"You have saved my life, father," he said at last. "What shall I say? Tell me, for I do not know how to thank you."

Father Pasquiou smiled, and made a little gesture of denial—of deprecation.

"No—no—do not thank me. What are words between people who understand each other, my dear Sarrasin? I did what I could—that is all. Thank madame, who brought us all here—who guessed your danger. If it had not

been for her, we should not have come—we should not have found out who had the gun.”

Sarrasin looked up quickly. Clothilde had approached the table. She was trying hard not to break down, and she forced herself to speak lightly, though she could not meet the Dauphin’s eyes.

“It was Bob’s gun,” she said. “It was Bob’s fault. He took the gun without leave, and Sibylle Moro got hold of it. M. d’Hérista, I shall never forgive myself for letting him have it at all. If that man had——” she broke off suddenly.

“Do not distress yourself, madame,” Sarrasin said quietly.

“Distress myself! Do you think I am pleased to know that you have nearly been murdered?” she said, almost angrily. “And it was my fault—mine and Bob’s.”

Sarrasin was about to reply when, for the second time that evening, a figure appeared from behind the tapestry—a figure which caused them all to turn toward it with simultaneous exclamations of astonishment.

It was the figure of a very small boy, attired in a dressing-gown somewhat sketchily put on; but it was also the figure of Tragedy Incarnate, of Remorse in visible human shape. Poor Bob, left at the villa, had been unable to endure the contemplation of all the harm he had done. He, too, had remembered the turret door, and his one

idea was to reach his beloved Dauphin, at any cost. He had come round by land, running all the way, as well as he could, in the dark. His little bare legs were scratched by thorns and bruised by tumbles; his small, pathetic face was stained with tears.

He stood for a second, staring at them with scared and miserable eyes. Then his face brightened with such rapture that Clothilde's heart melted, and her anger faded away. But he did not look at her. With a cry he ran across the room and almost flung himself at the Dauphin's feet.

For the first time that evening, Clothilde saw that Sarrasin was really moved. The boy's joy touched him as his own danger had never done. Bob was clinging to his boots and sobbing convulsively. He bent down and lifted him in his arms.

"Bob, do not cry. I am quite safe, there is nothing to worry about." His deep voice was very soft as he held the boy to him. "Dear little Bob, do not cry like that."

But it was a very long time before the united efforts of his mother, Father Pasquiou, and Sarrasin, could calm poor Bob's agitation. He had quite expected to find the Dauphin shot, through his own fault, and the shock of finding him alive and well was almost more than he could bear. Clothilde had never seen him in such distress: the violence of his crying really frightened

her at last. She tried to comfort him, but he clung to Sarrasin as though he would never let go.

When at last he remembered his mother's existence he lifted a wet face from the Dauphin's shoulder, and gasped out a pathetic apology.

"Oh, maman, do not be jealous!" he sobbed. "You said that I had shot him—that he was dead!"

Clothilde bent her head and kissed him. As she looked up, she met the Dauphin's eyes. They were fixed upon her with a new expression of wonder, of hope—almost of fear. For a moment she did not move, and Sarrasin's gaze met hers. She read his secret in his eyes—she was too happy to care if she betrayed her own.

Father Pasquiou was quietly unloading the gun, with his back toward them. Bob's face was hidden against the Dauphin's blue shirt. Sarrasin hesitated, looking at her still. Then he took the hand which she had laid on Bob's shoulder, and lifted it to his lips.

She coloured, and half drew back. Then a smile broke like sunshine over her face, though her gay, brown eyes were full of tears.

"I—I am not jealous," she said, as simply as a child.

XXXV

CHRYSANDER never knew afterward how he lived through the week which followed the Italian's murder. In later years he looked back upon it as the worst he had known since the "devils of Hérista" first exerted their unholy influence upon his life.

For the horror was never far from him now. In some indefinable way it had come quite close to him at last. He felt it at his elbow as he sat writing, it stood behind his chair while he read. The sunlight had no power to drive it away. It was always there, always present—the shadow of something terrible and evil which had fallen upon him, and from which it was impossible to escape.

Ever since the night on which he had seen that wild, white face staring up at him through the clear water, he had felt it beside him. His terror had found a shape at last. He knew that that face was always near him, always watching him, even though he could not perceive it with his actual sight. Those strange, inhuman eyes were upon him, turn where he would. They pursued him, they haunted him, waking and sleeping. He felt that they were always there.

Then there fell upon him a dreadful mental lethargy, from which he could not rouse himself. He gave up all attempts to take an interest in other things. A fascination was upon him,

which shut out all else in heaven and earth. The terrible magic of the blue bay possessed him. He was a prisoner of the first and most ancient of conquerors—a slave to the profound and unfathomable enchantment of the sea.

All about him, the air seemed heavy with mystery, terrible with a wild menace which he could not understand. It was the mystery which had baffled him long ago in the eyes of the girl singing on the rocks, with the moonlight on her face. It was the mystery of the bare, red shore, of the sighing pines holding out their twisted arms to the horizon, which knew no end. It was the secret of the blue waters, for ever singing as they crept upon their prey.

And always, behind it all, was the presence of that unseen creature which watched him, which waited with invisible eyes and arrested breath—for what?

Gradually he began to know—or to think that he knew. It was waiting for this physical horror to die of exhaustion, or of familiarity. It was waiting until the fear which was his only protection wore itself out and left him to his fate. In that hour, it knew that he was lost.

Sooner or later, he knew that that hour must come.

XXXVI

IN the midst of the strange numbness which had come upon him, he heard the story of Sarra-sin's danger with something of a shock.

It was the afternoon of the day following Sibylle's visit to the château. The news came through one of his crew, for he had not been ashore that morning. He heard it, and went ashore at once.

Presumably, some one at the villa had seen the boat put off; for when he landed, the tall blue figure of the Dauphin was waiting for him on the beach.

"If you had not come, I was just preparing to pay you a visit," he said, as he shook hands.

"You?"

Chrysander's surprise was natural, for, despite all his entreaties and invitations, Sarrasin had never been on board the yacht.

The Dauphin smiled a little as he answered. There was an unusual radiance on his dark face.

"Yes, it is quite true. I was really ready to invade your Esterel."

"You would have been more than welcome. But why did you want me?"

Sarrasin walked beside him for a moment without answering.

"I wanted you to congratulate me," he said at last. "Madame la Duchesse de Maillane has promised to marry me."

Chrysander stopped dead, and looked at him with a face of genuine astonishment.

"You!" he said again.

Sarrasin laughed quietly.

"I am not surprised that you do not believe it," he said. "I hardly believe it myself. I tell her that it is a dream, and presently I shall wake up. No, it is really true," he continued in another tone. "Are you still too shocked to speak, my dear Chrysander? I know what you must think, very well—I know how very little I deserve such happiness. I have told her so, but she will not believe it."

"She is right," Chrysander said warmly. He was too generous to bear malice against this man whom he had always admired so sincerely, for winning the woman whom he himself had lost. "She is right, and more than right, Sarrasin. I wish you both happiness, with my whole heart."

"Thank you! I knew what you would say, though I know you think me a great many things that I am not," the Dauphin said simply.

"I could not think you better than you are, any more than I could think her so," Chrysander said. "Did she send you to tell me?"

"Yes, and she wished you to come up to the villa and see her. By the way, there is one thing I want you to do."

"What is that?"

"She is very interested about that poor Italian's death, and she wants to find out what caused it. If she speaks to you about it, do not encourage her to make any inquiries. It is better left alone."

Chrysander looked at him curiously.

"You do not wish her to find out?"

"If you put it in that way, I do not. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," Chrysander said slowly.

They went up to the villa. Sarrasin vanished to search for Bob, and left Chrysander to offer his congratulations alone. Clothilde received them with her gayest smile.

"You are such an old friend, my dear Paul," she said, "and—and I have thought, once or twice, that I neglected you dreadfully after your marriage—though, of course you did not want me—I know that." She said it with an affectionate friendliness that hid no bitterness. She could not have disliked even Conca, to-day. "That was why I wished you to know sooner than any one—except Bob, by the way, who has given us his blessing with a dignity which made me feel about fifteen," she added, laughing.

"I suppose he is delighted?"

"Yes—he adores Sarrasin, you know. I really think Bob has done most of the business, for he certainly fell in love with the Dauphin before I did," she said, with a smile. "When we announced the great news to him he beamed

in our faces, and said I must be dreadfully pleased! Complimentary to me, as I told him."

"It was complimentary to M. d'Hérista, at any rate."

"Yes—and he will not have too many compliments of that kind paid him at first, I am afraid," she said more gravely. "My brother will be very angry, of course. You know what Robert is, Paul—anything that he has not arranged is wrong. But I have him at my mercy," she added, laughing, "for he told me the other day that Bob was growing unmanageable, and, if any one can manage that child, it is Sarra-sin. I suppose you know what happened last night?"

"Yes. I heard it just now, and came off to see you."

"It was terrible," she said, shuddering. "I never want to spend such a half-hour again, as I spent crossing to the château. We have had a great many excitements here lately, it seems to me; and I never used to think Hérista exciting. There was that poor Italian, now. That is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of, and I am determined to find out about it, sooner or later. Sarra-sin will not tell me, but I will find out."

Chrysander waited for a moment. When he spoke there was a new tone in his voice.

"How will you do that?"

"One night I will go and sit on the rocks

and watch. Perhaps I shall see the mystery of the Rade at last—the devils of Hérista.”

“You will see nothing,” Chrysander said quietly.

XXXVII

THE horror had left him.

He did not go back to the yacht. He went into the forest and walked along the winding road beside the sea. Presently he climbed down from the road to the shore, and lay down on the rocks. His fear had vanished. He had known lately that at last it would come to this, and it had come just as he expected. He was not sorry, though he knew what it meant to himself. At last he would know—he would stand face to face with this thing which had terrorised him for so long. He would face it, defy it, do battle with it—not for himself, but for the sake of those two people, whose happiness he desired at that moment above all things on earth.

Before Clothilde de Maillane kept her word, and went out to almost certain death upon the rocks—he knew now that it meant certain death—he would see this nameless horror for himself. He would know the worst. The Italian’s fate had not warned her: his own might do so. If he fell a victim to the devils of Hérista, surely she would not dare to go out upon the rocks?

The sun went down, and the shadow of the

hills fell upon the sea. He lay silent and motionless, his face turned steadily toward the water, as though toward an enemy. The scented breath of the pine-trees rose from the green, tasseled branches toward the quiet sky. A pale mist wandered like a ghost under the pines, and the deep, clear water glowed with reflected lights of mother-o'-pearl.

Chrysander lay very still while the sunset darkened to dusk, and the dusk to night. Presently, a blue radiance of moonlight grew softly yet steadily in the hushed air. The great spaces of the sea were etched in grey and silver lines under the moonlight, and the delicate shadows of evening clouds, drifting before the gentle breath of the night across the sky. The red rocks took on fantastic shapes, the twisted arms of the pines seemed to writhe, as though with a grotesque unnatural life. Now and then a white flicker of foam broke luminously along the irregular curves of the shore.

Above, on the higher ground under the trees, a dark figure moved silently nearer and nearer, until it was only a few yards above Chrysander's head. He did not look round, or he must have seen it as it moved cautiously across an open patch of moonlight. Presently it dropped behind a tree and lay still.

Sarrasin d'Hérista had noticed that no boat put off from the yacht to fetch Chrysander back. He had sat all the afternoon on the terrace of the

Villa Mimosa, and no boat had come ashore. Of that he was certain. When it grew dark he left the villa, but he did not go back to the château. As he loitered under the pines, his quick eyes caught sight of Chrysander lying upon the rocks.

The moon rose higher and higher in heaven. To the left the dim whiteness of the yacht made a ghost-like glimmer in the water.

Chrysander still lay motionless. He did not know for how many hours he had kept his singular watch. He was not conscious of the passage of time, and he only noted the moonlight because he knew it must bring that for which he waited.

Suddenly he lifted his head, and fixed his eyes eagerly upon the quiet surface of the sea.

Between him and the yacht something seemed moving through the water toward the rocks on which he lay. He caught the flash of a quick, regular movement, the silver gleam of water flung back into the moonlit air.

This thing, whatever it was, came nearer every moment. It moved with incredible swiftness, and lightly, almost with the speed of a bird flying through the air. The feathery flicker of water-drops moved with it and defined its course; now and then the moonlight, falling upon it, revealed a pale gleam, as of wet gold. The moving brightness neared the shore, and disappeared rapidly behind a high, jutting rock.

Chrysander rose suddenly to his feet. Sarra-sin, at his post above, drew a long breath of expectation. Then, from behind the rocks, a figure emerged into the clear light of the moon—a figure, strange, and beautiful, and terrible, with the terror of the water from which it came—the figure of a woman with wet draperies of glistening white, and wet gold hair streaming upon her bare shoulders and gleaming arms.

It was Conca. She came lightly across the ragged points of the rocks. The moonlight was on her face, on her shining hair. At first she saw nothing, though Chrysander stood but a few yards from her.

Then—she saw. An indefinable change passed over her, as a breeze passes over the sea and ruffles it. She stood still, looking at Chrysander.

Slowly, as she looked, a mask seemed to slip from her face. It was the mask of that humanity which she had worn before human eyes. As it vanished, a masked face, a face unspeakably awful in its sincerity, took its place. It was the face which Chrysander had seen looking up at him through the water.

He stood staring at it in silence. He felt no horror, no fear. He was past feeling fear. The last protection left him—the physical horror which he had felt so often—was gone for ever.

The face held him, fascinated him. It was not a woman who stood there in the moon-

light, but a beast of prey in a woman's shape. Perhaps, even, it was something more than that.

It was the sea itself which stood there—its beauty, its barbarity, its cruelty, without end or remorse. It was the sea—the enemy, the enchantress, the devourer of men. In those mysterious eyes lay the terror of storm and wreck, the despair of drowning sailors, the hunger and the heartlessness of the great waves dashing upon their prey. This was the hunger written upon her face—the vast, relentless hunger of the sea, which is never satisfied. This was the beauty of her—the beauty of the blue waves, singing to entice their victims to death. This was the magic of her voice—the voice of the Sirens, luring the souls of men into their power—the voice of the great depths, the music of the unsounded sea.

And as Chrysander looked, the enchantment came upon him too—the glamour whose end is death. He saw only the supreme beauty of this horror which had haunted him for so long. He saw only the blue gleam of the waves under the moonlight, the unfathomable depths of those eyes which drew him to them: he read the riddle of those cold lips, which were curved with that strange look of hunger which nothing could satisfy.

He moved toward her across the rocks.

The smile deepened in the beautiful, terrible

face. Then, suddenly, the dark figure of Sarrasin d'Hérista flashed before him.

He heard a cry like the cry of a wild beast cheated of its prey. For one moment he saw the smile on Conca's face change to a look of fury, of hatred, of fear.

Then Sarrasin's strong fingers closed upon her throat. The cry died—choked. A moment more, and he saw the tall blue figure of the Dauphin standing on the edge of the rocks with a white shadow in its arms.

He hurled the shadow over the rocks, just as Chrysander fell back into the darkness which seized upon him, and blotted out the moonlight with merciful oblivion.

The blue moonlight fell quietly upon the red, curving shore, upon the twisted pines, upon the waves which whispered among the rocks.

Far out, a white shadow floated toward the open sea.

The waves rocked it gently, as though with unseen hands. It seemed as though some strange power drifted it through the clear water.

Now and then a faint cry arose in the air—a cry, long and sorrowful. The water was alive with shadowy figures fleeing from the shore. A great cloud of moving things, vague, impalpable, terrified, shone like silver across the cold moon.

But the white shadow showed no sign of terror or of haste. It drifted outward steadily,

with a gleam of pale hair showing upon the darkness of the water. It was white as a shell which the storm bears far away—an empty shell, in which nothing will live again.

Perhaps it was really a shell, after all—a body which had never held a soul, but into which had entered for a while the mystery of a life not human—a life torn from the depths of the unsounded sea.

THE END

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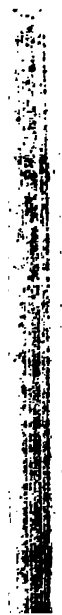
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